



Short Stories I. from the
Strand Magazine by Mrs.
L. T. Meade, Robert
Eustace & Clifford Halifax

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AN ILLUSTRATED MONTHLY

Short Stories I. by Mrs. L. T. Meade, Robert Eustace and Clifford Halifax
The Strand Magazine Volumes 8 to 26

Portraits of Celebrities at Different Times of Their Lives: Mrs. L. T. Meade -
December 1898

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The Room with the Blurred Faces - April 1901 (U.S. edition only) [by Mrs. L. T.
Meade & Robert Eustace]

Spangle-Winged - July 1901 (U.S. edition only) [by Mrs. L. T. Meade & Clifford
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The Man Who Disappeared - December 1901 [by Mrs. L. T. Meade & Robert
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Portraits of Celebrities

MRS. L. T. MEADE.

WE are sure that our readers will be glad to avail themselves of this opportunity of a closer acquaintance with Mrs. Meade, the well-known



at Different
Times of
their Lives.

inclination towards literature. "Great St. Benedicts" and "Scamp and I" were her first books, and they were very successful, the latter especially, being translated into many languages. Since then she has worked at the



AGE 25.

From a Photo. by the London Stereoscopic Company

AGE 19.
From a Photograph.



AGE 35.

From a Photo. by Intenham, Regent Street.



From a Photo. by) PRESENT DAY. (Window & Green.

novelist, and one of the most popular contributors to THE STRAND MAGAZINE. For seventeen years Mrs. Meade has been one of the most industrious modern writers of fiction. She was born in the county of Cork, where her father, a clergyman, held a living, and it is here that she first developed her strong

rate of four or five volumes a year. Mrs. Meade is represented by a story in the present number, while "The Brotherhood of the Seven Kings" is too recent in the memory of our readers to need mention here.

A Horrible Fright.

BY L. T. MEADE.



DON'T think I am at all nervous, and, therefore, when I say that I am about to describe two hours of absolute agony, I hope my readers will believe that the circumstances were at the best exceptional, and will still give me credit for being at least as brave as most girls of my age.

I have always despised so-called nerves. When a child I quite loved to sleep in the dark. At school I was the prime mover of ghost stories, and I remember now that some of my practical jokes verged strangely upon the unkind and even dangerous. I have been educated quite up to modern ideas. It is only a year since I left Girton, and I am now comfortably established at home with my father and mother. I am the only daughter, and am between twenty-three and twenty-four years of age. We live in a large place about an hour's ride by rail from London. I have my own special horse, and a little pony carriage besides for my exclusive use. I also have my study or boudoir, and can order what books I please for my own benefit, not only from Mudie, but from the local booksellers. I am passionately fond of music, and can play two or three instruments. I think I can say, without any false pride, that my performances on the violin are rather better than those of most amateurs. I am also great at all kinds of out-door sports and games. I am the champion player of the tennis club to which I belong, and I am at the present time successfully getting up a lady's golf club. In short, I think I may truly say of myself that I represent the average, up-to-date, well-educated, rather strong-minded, nineteenth-century girl.

Now, I must tell about my fright. You can imagine that it must have been something special to put me into such a state of terror that I cannot think of it even now without shuddering.

I received an invitation late last autumn to go to see my grandfather, who lives in Dublin. My mother did not particularly wish me to go. I really think mothers must have premonitions, for there was no apparent reason for my not taking such a

simple and easily-accomplished journey. I had been abroad a good deal, and had had adventures more than one; therefore, when my mother fretted herself about my going from London to Dublin, *via* Holyhead, I could not help laughing at her.

"If you must go alone, Virginia," she said, "had you not better travel by day?"

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense," I said. "I *hate* travelling by day, particularly by a route which I already know. Besides, it is such a waste of time. At night, one can sleep and travel together. Oh, say no more about it dear, good mother. I'll take the night mail from Euston, this evening, and have breakfast with grandfather in the morning."

My mother made no further remonstrances, but I heard her sighing in the most aggravating style, and I knew she was murmuring to herself about my headstrongness and how I never would listen to reason.

Nothing makes me so obstinate as those muttered remonstrances of my relatives. Are they afraid of me, that they don't speak out? I am always amenable to reason, but when people mutter over me, then I become simply mulish. I adore my dear mother, but even for her I cannot be expected to give up my own way when I hear her muttering that it is "Just like Virginia."

My things were packed, and I started off in good time to catch the night mail at Euston.

"You had better go in one of the ladies' carriages," said my father.

I quite gasped in horror when he made this audacious proposal.

"Now, *do* you suppose I am likely to do anything quite so old-maidish?" I replied. "No, I have fixed on the exact corner where I shall snooze away from Euston to Holyhead." I led my father, as I spoke, to a carriage where two old gentlemen had already comfortably established themselves. They had spread out their rugs, and taken complete possession of the corners which were out of the draught. I was oblivious to draughts, and chose my corner opposite the old gentleman who was nearest to the entrance door. My father supplied me with three or four evening papers. I had an uncut novel in my bag, and

a little reading-lamp, which I could fasten to the window ledge. Two or three moments later I had said farewell to my father, and the great express—the Wild Irish Girl—had steamed in grand style out of the station.

I like the feeling of being whirled through space in an express train going at the top of its speed. I looked at the evening papers. Their contents did not specially interest me. I then gazed at my opposite neighbour. He was very stout and very red. He tucked his travelling rug tightly about him, and before we had passed Willesden was fast asleep. He made a distressing noise with his loud snores, and I thought him decidedly irritating.

The express went on its way without let or hindrance. Now and then it swayed from side to side, as if its own great speed were making it giddy; then again it steadied itself, and rushed on and on with a rhythmic sort of motion, which was infinitely soothing, and caused me to forget my two uninteresting companions, and to sink gradually into the land of dreams.

I was awakened presently from quite a sound nap by the slowing of the train. It was coming into a great station, which I found was Chester. We must have passed Crewe while I was asleep. My two companions were now all alive and brisk. They were fastening



"MY TWO COMPANIONS WERE ALL ALIVE AND BRISK."

For a moment or two I almost regretted that I had not gone in an empty ladies' carriage. The other old gentleman was scarcely a more agreeable travelling companion. He had a noisy cough, and a bad cold. He blew his nose, and he coughed about every two minutes, and then he looked around him to see if there were any possible draughts. He not only shut his own window but the ventilator above as well, and then he glared at the ventilator which belonged to the snoring old gentleman and me. I made up my mind that *that* ventilator should only be shut over my fallen body.

up their rugs and folding their papers, and I saw that they intended to leave the train.

"If you are going on to Holyhead," said the snoring one to me, "you have ten minutes to wait here—quite time to get a cup of tea, if you want one."

I thanked him, and thought that I would carry his suggestion into effect. A cup of tea would be perfect, and would set me up for the remainder of my journey. I accordingly stepped on to the platform, and went over the bridge to the great waiting-rooms, which presented at this time a gay scene of eager, hungry, fussy men and women sitting at

tables, and standing at counters, each and all of them eating and drinking for bare life.

I ordered my tea, drank it standing at the counter, paid for it, and also for a bun, which I carried away with me in a paper bag, and returned to my carriage. I saw a heap of rugs and a large black bag deposited in the corner away from mine, and wondered with a faint passing curiosity who my new travelling companion was likely to be. The guard came up at this moment to see if I were comfortable. He said that we would not stop again until we reached Holyhead, and asked me if I wanted for anything.

I said "No."

"Perhaps you'd like me to lock the carriage door, miss?" he said. "The train is not too full to-night, and I can manage it."

I laughed and pointed to the rugs and bag in the opposite corner.

"Someone has already taken possession," I said.

"But if you wish, miss, I'll put those things in another carriage," said the guard.

"No, no," I replied, "I don't mind company in the least."

Just then my fellow-traveller put in an appearance. He was a big man, wrapped up in a great ulster and with a muffler round his throat and mouth. The guard looked at him, I thought, a little suspiciously. This made me angry. I have no patience with those squeamish girls who think every man who sees them must offer them either admiration or insult. I looked very cheerful, made way for the traveller to take his seat, and smiled and thanked the guard. A moment later the train started on its way.

We had just got well outside the station when the gentleman in the ulster and muffler carefully unwound the latter appendage from his mouth and throat. He folded it up neatly, and put it into his black bag. Afterwards he took off his ulster. I now saw that he was a fairly good-looking man of about eight and twenty. He wore a full moustache of raven hue, and a short beard. He had very black and piercing eyes. When I looked at him, I discovered that he also looked at me.

"Now, are you getting nervous, Virginia, or are you not?" I murmured to myself. "Why may not a man look at a girl if he pleases? There is an old proverb that a cat may look at a king. Let me suppose, therefore, that the man opposite is a well-grown and presentable cat, and that I am his Majesty the king. The cat may stare as

long as he pleases. The king will not disturb himself."

Accordingly, I prepared to light my reading-lamp, as I knew that I could not possibly fall asleep under the gaze of those watchful, dark eyes.

I had just settled myself comfortably, and had taken my uncut novel out of my bag, when the stranger spoke to me.

"Do you object to my opening the window?" he asked.

"Certainly not," I replied. I gave him a distant little bow, which was meant to say that the cat must keep its distance, and lowered my eyes over the fascinating pages of my novel.

The train was now going at a rattling pace, and I found that the draught from the open window was rather more than I cared to be subjected to. I had just raised my head, and was about to ask my travelling companion if he would be kind enough to close it, when I met a sight which gave me the first premonition of that horror which this story is meant to describe. The man in the opposite corner had opened his black bag, and taken from it a pair of large, sharp-looking scissors, and also a razor. When I glanced at him he had opened the razor, and was gently and dextrously sharpening it on a leather strop which he had fastened to one of the buttons of the window. He met my eye as I met his, and smiled grimly.

I felt that a situation of some sort was imminent, and, closing my book, sat perfectly still with my hands tightly locked together and my heart beating loudly. The light from the reading-lamp fell full upon me, and I turned abruptly and put it out.

"I will thank you to light that lamp again," said the stranger. "Do so at once—there is no time to lose."

"I don't understand you," I said.

I tried to make my voice imperious and haughty, but I was terribly conscious that it came out of my throat in little gasps and jerks.

"Now, look here," said the man. "I know you are frightened, and I am not in the least surprised. I should be frightened if I were in your position. You are alone in a railway carriage with a man who could strangle you and throw your dead body on the line if he felt the least inclined to do so. No no—you don't get to the alarm bell. I am keeping guard over that. Now, I may as well tell you frankly that I have come into this railway carriage on purpose to have the pleasure of your society. I saw you get into the carriage



"HE HAD OPENED THE RAZOR."

at Euston, and I knew that you would be alone when you got to Chester. From Chester to Holyhead is a long run. The train is now comfortably on its way, and will not stop for nearly two hours. You see, therefore, that you are completely at my mercy. Your only chance of safety is in doing *exactly* what I tell you. Now, have the goodness to light that reading-lamp immediately."

The stranger's voice was imperious—he had now changed his seat to one opposite mine. His restless, brilliant eyes were fixed full on my face.

"Light the lamp," he said.

I obeyed him without a moment's hesitation.

When I had lit it he took it from my shaking fingers and fastened it to the cushion of the seat in the centre of the carriage.

"That is better," he said, "that is more cheerful. Now, see, I am going to kneel down. Look at my face. Can you see it well?"

"Yes," I answered.

"I have a good deal of hair, haven't I?"

"You have," I replied.

"Do you see this pair of scissors?"

"Yes."

"And this razor?"

"Yes."

"They're deadly weapons, are they not?"

"They could do mischief," I answered, in a faltering voice.

"Aye, aye, they could—and they will, too, unless a certain young lady does *exactly* what she is told. Now, come—the moment for action has arrived—take your gloves off."

I hesitated.

"Take them off," thundered the man.

They were off in a twinkling.

"Come up close, and begin."

"Begin what?"

"Don't be a fool. You have plenty of intelligence if you choose to exercise it. Cut off my moustache."

I drew back.

"I don't know how," I faltered.

"I'll soon teach you."

"How, pray?" I asked.

"By sharpening that razor a little more. Now, are you going to try? Take the scissors in your hand."

He knelt so that the light of the lamp should fall full on him, and gave me the scissors. I took it at once and began my task.

"Hold my chin," he said. "You can't do your work properly in that shaky way. Cut, I say—cut."

I did cut—God alone knows how I managed it, but I got the man's thick and sweeping moustache off. As I worked he gave me imperious directions.

"Cut clean," he said, "cut close and clean. You will have to shave me presently."

"That will be very dangerous for you," I ventured to retort.



"CUT, I SAY—CUT."

"Fudge," he replied. "You will be cool enough by that time. Now, is the moustache all gone?"

"Yes," I said.

"Cut the whiskers off."

"No," I answered.

"Yes," he replied.

He fixed his eyes on me, and I obeyed him. The whiskers were followed by the beard—the beard, by the hair on the man's head.

How my fingers ached! how my heart thumped! how those basilisk eyes seemed to pierce through me, and fill me with sick loathing and abject horror!

When I had finished the cutting process, he took from the depths of his bag some shaving apparatus, poured water into a little flask, made the soap lather, and desired me to shave him. I was now completely meek and subdued, and obeyed his least direction without a word. Fortunately for the man's life, I had on one or two occasions performed this operation on my brother, who taught me how to manage the razor, and complimented me on my skill. It came to my aid now. Notwithstanding the shaking

train, and the agitated state of my nerves, I performed my task well. I even became, in the queerest way, proud of my successful shaving. The man's cheeks and upper lip looked as innocent of hair as a baby's before I had done with him.

At last my task was done, and a shaven, uncouth object took the place of the handsome stranger who had come into the train an hour ago.

When my work was over he stooped, collected every scrap of hair, and flung it out of the window. Then he shut the window and told me to put out the reading-lamp.

I obeyed, and crouched back in my corner, trembling in every limb.

"You have only one more thing to do for me," he said.

"Oh, is there any more?" I panted. "I don't think my strength will hold out."

"Yes, it will," he replied. "This part of your task is easy. Turn your head and look out of the window. Don't look

back again under any circumstances, until I give you leave. If you do, you are a dead woman."

I turned my head.

I looked out into the black night. My eyes were swimming—my throat was dry, my heart continued to thump horribly. I felt that I had already lived through a lifetime. I had a kind of sensation that I should never have courage and buoyancy of heart again. The train went on its way, thumping and bounding. I heard the rustle of my companion's movements. Was he a madman? Yes, of course he must be mad. Was he stealing stealthily up now to murder me with that sharp and shining razor? Would the train ever reach its destination? Would the dreadful night ever go?

At last—at last, thank Heaven, I felt the motion of the great express perceptibly slackening. At the same instant my fellow-traveller spoke to me.

"You can look round now," he said. "Your task is over. All you have to do is to give me five minutes' grace, and you are safe."

I looked round eagerly. What I saw

forced a loud exclamation from my lips. The metamorphosis in my companion was now fully accomplished. An elderly clergyman, in complete and most correct clerical

took off his hat to me with a gracious movement.

"Bénédicité," he said, in a full and reverent voice.



"AN ELDERLY CLERGYMAN."

costume, was seated at the other end of the carriage. The hair which was seen below his hat was silvery white. He had white eyebrows. The rest of his face was clean shaven.

The train drew into the station.

The moment it did so, the clergyman flung open the door of the carriage. He

I saw him no more.

A moment later two detectives came up to the door. They asked eagerly if I were travelling alone, or if I had had a companion with a black moustache and beard.

I was positively too much stunned to reply to them. I don't think, to this day, my elderly clergyman was ever discovered.

Silenced.

BY L. T. MEADE AND ROBERT EUSTACE.



HE terrible time is over, but the agony of the last two months must remain with me as long as I live. To-morrow the girl I love will be married. For her I have suffered and almost died. We love those for whom we suffer—it is the law of life.

I am a lady by birth and a nurse by profession. Early in the winter of last year I was sent for to attend a nerve case. My patient was a girl of the name of Leonora Trefusis. She was only nineteen years of age. She had a lovely face, but she owed her beauty, not only to classical features and the extreme first tender bloom of youth, but also to an expression ever-varying and ever-beautiful. She was the victim, however, of nerve distress in one of its acute forms. The trouble was brought on by an unfortunate love affair.

Two years ago she had been engaged to a gallant officer in Her Majesty's service. Captain Gifford belonged to a cavalry regiment. He and Leonora had loved each other since they were children, and he hoped to return to England within a year to claim his bride. One of the many disturbances which are always taking place on the north-west frontier of India claimed him, however, as its prey. The news reached Leonora that her lover had been killed during an encounter with the tribes-men. His body was never recovered, and the stunning and terrible blow completely prostrated the young girl. For a time she was quite inconsolable, and that breakdown of nerve and physical health which specially required my services took place. I got her to confide her sorrows to me—she often talked of Captain Gifford and of the love she still bore to him. Once or twice she said, anxiously:—

"Nurse, he may not be dead, after all!"

I shook my head. I knew that it would be wrong to buoy my patient up with false hopes. Of course, the gallant captain was dead, or we should have heard of him long ago.

By-and-by, slowly and surely, Leonora began to get well, and almost immediately afterwards, rather to my astonishment, she became engaged to a Mr. Hertslet, one of

the cleverest surgeons in Harley Street. I had nursed patients for Mr. Hertslet before now, and never imagined for a moment that he was a marrying man. He was hard and dry in appearance—not more than thirty-five years of age, but he looked considerably older. His skin was of a deep olive, he was painfully thin, and had a wiry, alert appearance; his eyes were black as night. He had black hair also, which was cropped close to his head. His manner was quick and keen and very decided—he never spoke an unnecessary word, and seemed to be always engaged in abstruse speculations. Mr. Hertslet was a brain specialist, and it had been my lot to nurse some very complicated brain cases for him. No man in England had studied the anatomy of the brain more thoroughly. I am certain he knew the localization of every centre. All that modern science could tell him he had acquired. Now and then in moments of confidence he had spoken to me on the subject of his patients. I was extremely fond of anatomy, and I liked to listen to his explanations, to see his diagrams, to learn something of the wonderful mechanism of that most marvellous thing on earth, the human brain. I respected Mr. Hertslet, but it is also true that I feared him. When he became engaged to Leonora I could not but own to a feeling of consternation. Once I ventured to speak to my patient on the subject.

"I am sorry you are going to marry him," I said; "he is a hard man, and you are full of enthusiasm and fire. By-and-by he will crush your youth out of you."

The colour filled her cheeks, she clasped her hands together and looked earnestly at me.

"Why do you say that?" she remarked. "It is strange of you. Now, I will confess something. I do not love Mr. Hertslet: I only marry him because my father wishes it."

"Have you told him so?" I asked.

"Yes, he knows the exact truth. He is aware that I do not love him. All the love I possess is given to the man who lies in his unknown grave. Mr. Hertslet understands that, if such an impossible thing should happen as that Dick Gifford should come back, I could not marry him. Dick will never come back, of course, and in all pro-

bability I shall be married to Mr. Hertslet in two months from now. You will stay with me until the wedding is over, will you not, nurse?"

I readily promised, for I had already learned to love her well.

"But I promised to remain with her until after the wedding," I answered.

When I mentioned the wedding, a gleam of pleasure filled his black eyes.

"It seems strange, does it not," he said, in a thoughtful tone, "that such a young



I WILL CONFESS SOMETHING."

On a certain day not long after this conversation I happened to be alone, when the door of the room in which I was sitting was opened, and Mr. Hertslet came in. He looked eagerly around him. When he saw that Leonora was not present he raised his brows and came at once to my side.

"I want to say a word to you, Nurse Petre." As he spoke he seated himself near me.

"I mean to trust you," he said. "I have a very critical case in my private hospital just now. I want an excellent nurse, one who can be calm and firm, and who understands her work. The case is one of life or death. You will leave Miss Trefusis to-morrow and come to me."

I coloured with annoyance.

"I cannot do so," I replied. "Leonora is better, but she is still very dependent on me. There are times when her nervous malady still overcomes her."

"She will get over that," said the surgeon, with an impatient movement.

and beautiful girl should want a man like me?"

"She does not want you—you want her," I answered, boldly.

He looked at me and smiled. He had a slow smile, a cruel one—it reduced his lips to the thinness of a straight line, it showed his white teeth, which always seemed to me more to resemble those of an animal than a human being; then it passed, leaving his face serene, quiet, powerful.

"Nurse, you are a strange woman," he said; "too frank for your profession. Some day that frankness of yours will be your undoing. In your position it behoves you to be careful."

As he spoke he stood up.

"The case I want you to attend is a bad one, and I mean to trephine the day after to-morrow. If I am not successful, the victim will go mad; trephining is the one and only chance. You will come to my house to-morrow evening. The operation will take place on the following morning."



NURSE, YOU ARE A STRANGE WOMAN.

"I told you that I was engaged to Leonora," I said, angrily.

"I will arrange the matter with Miss Trefusis. I shall expect you. Good afternoon."

He smiled again in that enigmatical way and left the room.

Late that evening Leonora came to see me.

"I have come to say good-night, nurse," she said. "I feel terribly sad at the thought of the parting, but Mr. Hertslet must have his way."

"I am sorry," I answered. She came close to me and nestled by my side.

"And so am I sorry," she said. "I bitterly regret your leaving, but Paul wishes it; there is nothing else to be done."

"Do you feel that you must obey Mr. Hertslet in every particular?" I said, slowly.

She looked at me anxiously.

"When he becomes emphatic, I have to obey him," she said. "He is a person whom it is extremely difficult to resist. Don't you find it so yourself?"

"I do," I said; "I do"—and there was horror in my tone.

She was looking straight before her, and I doubt if she heard my last words.

"I shall miss you terribly," she said, at last. "Those nerve symptoms, which are my torture, may return when your strong presence is withdrawn. I mentioned this to Paul, but he only smiled. He says when I am his wife that I will never feel the trouble

which now worries me. I suppose that is likely to be the case; but, nurse, I am in no hurry to be married. As I told you already, I do not really love Mr. Hertslet: the man I love is the one who lost his life in India. I think of him constantly; I shall never forget him. Sometimes I am possessed with the belief that he is not really dead; there always seems to me a possibility of his returning to England."

"He is dead,"

I said, "I am certain he is dead. You must not encourage false hopes. I wish you all happiness, Leonora; there is no doubt that Mr. Hertslet loves you devotedly."

"He loves me terribly," she answered. "I wish he did not care so much—it is depressing to take so much and give so little. But come into my room, nurse, I have a strange wish to show you something that you have never yet seen—Captain Gifford's photograph. After I am married it will be wrong of me to look at it; but, until then, I may—I must."

I followed her to her room. She opened a drawer, took out a morocco case, opened it, and put it into my hands. It contained the photograph of a remarkably fine-looking man. The brow was lofty, the eyes wide open, very vivacious and full of life; the mouth was partly hidden by a moustache, but I could guess that its curves were sweet, and I was certain that when that face smiled it was like the sunshine.

"It is a good face," I said, quietly; "the face of a brave man. I am sorry for you, Leonora."

She looked up at me, and then suddenly burst into a passion of weeping.

Towards the evening of the next day I left her and went to Mr. Hertslet's hospital. The hospital was next door to his own house. Having been taken to my room and given some refreshment, a servant came in to ask me if I would like to go and see my patient.

"Mr. Hertslet is out," said the woman. "He said if you arrived sufficiently early you might like to see the gentleman to-night."

I assented willingly, and in my professional cap and apron followed the girl to the door of a large and spacious room on the first floor. I knocked, a manly voice said "Come in," and I entered. A tall man had risen to receive me; a lamp stood on the table behind him, his face and figure were in shadow. He came forward and held out his hand.

"I have heard of you, nurse," he said. "So your kind services are to be at my disposal?"

"Yes," I answered, "I shall be very glad to do what I can for you."

"Pray sit down. Has Mr. Hertslet told you anything of the nature of the operation which is to take place?"

"Yes," I replied. "He says that it is a serious one."

"It is. It is one of life or death. If I die, I die, and the world is well rid of a suffering invalid. If, on the other hand, I live and recover—ah, well, I have much to live for—perhaps you understand."

As he spoke he smiled. He had turned his face so that the lamp-light fell on it, and his smile flashed out on me in a most unexpected way. It transformed his face, making it brilliant and fascinating to an extraordinary degree. I had a curious, undefinable feeling that I had seen it before, but I could not imagine where or when. I liked him, I took heartily to him on the spot, his voice rang true, I knew him to be a good man.

"I shall do my very utmost for you," I said, with enthusiasm, "be quite certain of that. I have had considerable experience in cases like yours. You suffer from a brain trouble?"

"I do. A couple of years ago I had a severe blow on the head—Mr. Hertslet believes that there is pressure on a certain portion of the brain. Since the time of my accident I have suffered from terrible epileptic fits. If nothing can be done to relieve me I shall soon be in a lunatic asylum. To that awful fate I prefer the chance which the surgeon's knife offers. Even in India I heard of Dr. Hertslet's skill, and resolved to come to him whenever I could set foot again in my native land. I have done so, and here I am."

"Is it long since you returned?" I asked, after a pause.

"Only a fortnight. I had curious adventures, about which

I will tell you another time. When with my regiment I received the blow on the head which I have just mentioned. I was supposed to be dead, but was taken prisoner by the tribe of"—he paused abruptly. "I must not talk too long," he said; "the slightest excitement brings on a fit. Perhaps, nurse, you will go to my room and unpack some of my clothes. Here are the keys."

He took a bunch from his pocket, gave me a few directions, and I went into his bedroom, which adjoined the sitting-room. It was a well-furnished room—a large travelling portmanteau stood on a pair of trestles by the door. I proceeded to unlock it, and began to put my patient's clothes away neatly in the different drawers which were ready to receive them. At the bottom of the portmanteau I found a small leather writing-case. In taking it out of its resting-place, it fell from my hands, the leather band snapped, and the case flew open. Its contents were scattered on the floor. Vexed with my clumsiness, I stooped to collect them. Amongst a pile of envelopes and sheets of paper lay a photograph. I took it up to replace it in the writing-case, then I paused, uttered an exclamation, and running to the light gazed eagerly at the face which was suddenly revealed to me on the little piece of cardboard. It was the well-known and very lovely face of my late patient, Leonora Trefusis. My brain seemed to whirl. For a



"IT WAS THE WELL-KNOWN AND VERY LOVELY FACE."

moment I could scarcely think distinctly. Then, like a flash, the truth, or what seemed like the truth, became clear to me. The man whom I was about to nurse had only just returned from India. While there he had gone through strange experiences, had been wounded in battle, taken prisoner—I clasped my hands together. Excitement almost overpowered me. Was it possible that I was about to nurse Leonora's old lover? Was it to be my delightful task to bring happiness to the girl I loved best in the world? But I must make sure—I must do nothing rash. I returned to the sitting-room.

"I have unpacked your things," I said to the patient; "you will find everything in perfect order in the different drawers. By the way, do you mind letting me know your name?"

"My name?—oh, Captain Gifford," he said, shortly.

He looked worried, and I did not dare to disturb him further. I knew the truth, however; my heart beat wildly. I made an excuse, and a moment afterwards left the room.

It was now nearly ten o'clock at night, but still not too late for me to go to Leonora in order to tell her what I had discovered. I rushed to my room, put on my cloak and bonnet, and was just descending the stairs, when I heard a latchkey in the lock, and Mr. Hertslet let himself in.

"Ah, nurse," he said, "I am glad you are here. Have you seen the patient?"

"Yes," I replied. "I have been with Captain Gifford for some little time; I have unpacked his things. I do not think he cares to be disturbed again to-night, and —"

"You are going out?" he said, raising his brows with an interrogatory gesture.

"I am anxious to see Miss Trefusis," I replied; "it is not too late, and I have some—news for her." I tried to speak quietly. It occurred to me that I ought to be careful, but in spite of myself my voice trembled. I was terribly excited, and did not think of Mr. Hertslet in the matter. He looked at me steadily, then he spoke.

"I cannot spare you to go out just now," he said, in a cold tone. "The operation is to be performed early to-morrow morning, and there is much to attend to. I wish also to talk the case carefully over with you. Please go into my consulting-room, I will join you in a moment."

As he spoke he walked down the hall, threw open the door of his consulting-room, and motioned me to enter. I went in, he shut the door behind me. The electric light

was on, the place looked bright and yet gruesome; a queer presentiment of coming danger visited me. I had little time, however, to give way to it, for in a couple of moments Mr. Hertslet entered the room.

"Now, nurse," he said, "I am ready to attend to you—you want to see Miss Trefusis, and you speak of news: what do you mean?"

"I have made a very extraordinary discovery," I said.

He gave me a steady look, then said, in that voice which always compelled both my fear and respect:—

"You are an excellent nurse, but it is a pity you are so excitable. Excitement is bad for a woman in your profession. What possible discovery can you have made in this house which can bring that tremble to your voice? I admit that you are a good nurse, but you will not long remain so if you allow your feelings to get the better of you."

"Never mind about me now," I said, impatiently; "I want to ask you a question."

"Ask it," he said.

"If all goes well, you intend to marry Leonora Trefusis in about six weeks from now?"

"Have you taken leave of your senses, nurse? Of course I shall marry Miss Trefusis; but why allude to a fact you know quite well?"

"I have more to say," I interrupted. "You are engaged to her on a condition."

"That is not your affair."

"It happens to be my affair," I replied. "You engaged yourself to Leonora on a condition. She promised to marry you solely and entirely because she believed her old lover to be dead."

"Oh, you allude to that old affair," said Mr. Hertslet, with a perceptible note of relief in his voice. "I do not even know the name of the man, but Leonora did speak of a boy-and-girl affair. The fellow, whoever he was, is dead, however. I certainly did say to her if such a thing should happen as that the dead should return to life, I should in honour be obliged to give her up."

"And you never asked the name of her lover?"

"No; the subject scarcely interested me—I wished to avoid it. Before Miss Trefusis is my wife three months she will have forgotten that the man ever existed. Passion like mine will be fully returned."

"Mr. Hertslet," I said, "you must be prepared for a blow. Leonora's old lover exists; he is alive. As from the gate of

death he has returned, he is in this house—his name is Captain Gifford."

The surgeon was standing before me; he staggered when I spoke, then he held himself erect.

"What do you mean?" he said.

"What I say. The name of Leonora's old lover is Captain Gifford. He is upstairs—he is your patient. Go to Leonora, if you do not believe me, and ask her what the name of her old lover was. She will tell you Captain Gifford. If you do not still believe me, ask her to show you his photograph. The photograph is the photograph of the man upstairs. He is alive—he is your patient."

"Take a chair," said Mr. Hertslet.

I dropped into the nearest chair.

"Now, repeat that story again," he said.

I did so. When I had finished he spoke.

"I must leave you for a little, nurse."

I started up, I was really frightened.

"I will not stay in this room," I exclaimed; "I must see Leonora, and at once."

"You will not see her to-night. While I am absent you must remain here."

He walked to the door, opened it, went out, and shut and locked it behind him. At the end of an hour he returned. His face was as calm and powerful looking as ever. He locked the door again and put the key in his pocket.

"I have verified the truth of your statement," he said. "Now, nurse, you and I must come to terms."

"No," I answered.

"Do you dare to defy me?"

"Yes."

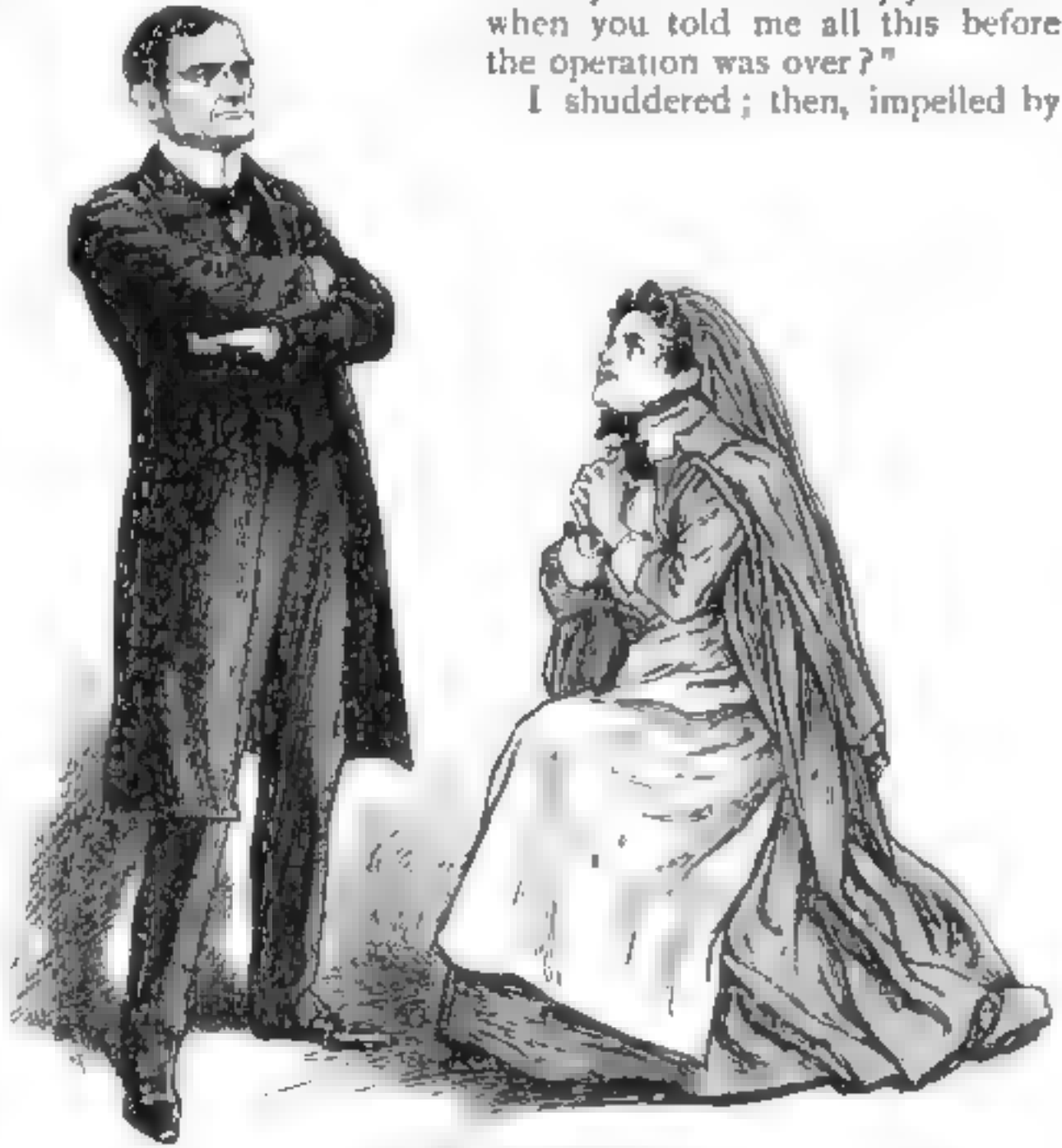
"You will scarcely do so when you know everything. I have spent the last hour looking into the truth of what you have said. I find that your words are correct."

"You did not then believe me?"

"I believed you partly, not wholly; I was resolved to prove the thing for myself. I

have visited Miss Trefusis. For the first time since our engagement I alluded to the subject of her old lover—I talked of him gently. She wept. I kissed her and assured her of my sympathy. I asked his name and particulars about him. I have seen his photograph. You are right; my rival lives, he is upstairs. To-morrow I am expected to perform a most critical operation upon him. Think what you have put into my power. The operation is one of extreme difficulty. The slightest swerve of the knife means death. Don't you see how madly you acted when you told me all this before the operation was over?"

I shuddered; then, impelled by



"I FELL ON MY KNEES."

the most unexpected terror, I fell on my knees.

"For Heaven's sake do not commit murder!" I cried.

"Get up; I have not the slightest intention of committing murder. I shall operate upon Captain Gifford, and when I do so, the operation will be successful. The case is too critical, too valuable for me to throw it away. I shall gain fresh influence in my profession by the successful performance of so difficult an operation. Ambition and love run a neck-and-neck race with me. I do not intend to sacrifice either, but I have resolved to do this. The operation shall be postponed.

I will give Captain Gifford excellent reasons for this. I shall keep him here, but I shall not operate until after my marriage. Now, do you understand? You can, if you so wish it, return to Leonora, and stay with her until her marriage, or—you can defy me."

"You mean that I am to go back to Leonora and not tell her what I have discovered?"

"That is what I mean; but you can please yourself."

"What other alternative do you offer?"

"*I shall seal your lips!*"

"How? What do you mean? You will make me a prisoner?"

"Nothing of the kind."

"Then how can you seal my lips?"

"That is my secret. You do not leave this house to-night. To-morrow morning I may speak to you again. If to-morrow you make me the necessary promise, I am sure you will keep it, and I shall trust you to return to Leonora. If you refuse to make the promise, I shall seal your lips."

As he spoke he opened the door of his consulting-room and motioned me to leave it.

Trembling in every limb, I went to my room. I was horribly afraid. My earnest wish was to get out of the house. I remained in my room for a couple of hours, then I went downstairs. I tried to unlock the

wearing my bonnet and cloak. The time flew by; the house was silent as the grave. Overcome with excitement and emotion, I suddenly found myself dozing. I determined to resist slumber, and started up. Once more I gave way to it; at last I fell into a deep sleep. A sudden movement awoke me. I opened my eyes wide. In an instant I was making a frantic effort to struggle to my feet. I found I was unable to do so. Mr. Hertslet was in the room. A ward lamp stood on the dressing-table; the electric light was brightly on. The surgeon was bending over me. He was holding something to my mouth and nostrils, and in his other hand both of mine were clasped tightly. I made another futile effort to rise—the faint, sweet smell of chloroform was all too apparent. Each limb was weighted as if with lead. Hertslet's cruel eyes were looking into mine.

"You are in my power," he said. "I seal your lips."

As he spoke I ceased to struggle—nothing in all the world seemed to matter; I did not care whether I lost my senses or not. I remembered nothing more. When at last I awoke it was morning; the windows of the room were wide open. I was lying with my head close to the sharp corner of the fender, I felt queer and heavy, and there was a dull



"I WAS LYING WITH MY HEAD CLOSE TO THE SHARP CORNER OF THE FENDER."

front door. As I was doing so, Mr. Hertslet came out and confronted me.

"Go back to your room," he said, slowly, and with that smile flitting across his lips which I have before mentioned.

I fled upstairs as though I were pursued by a fury. I sat down by my bedside, still

pain in my temples; I wondered what had happened and why I was lying thus. For a moment or two I lay quiet, thinking over the events of the preceding night. Leonora's lover had returned; he was to be operated on that morning; and I was the nurse who was chosen to undertake the case. Still, I was

in no hurry to rise, each limb was soothed, nothing seemed greatly to matter. Presently the door was opened, and a servant entered with a can of hot water. She started back in astonishment and terror when she saw me. Then, hastily putting the can down, she ran towards me.

"What is the matter?" she cried; "what has happened?"

I made an effort to speak, but not a word would come, only a gurgling noise in my throat. I tried to struggle to my feet. Good heavens! my right side, arm, and leg were powerless! I sank back with a moan. As I did so, I noticed a little blood on the corner of the fender against which I had evidently fallen. The girl, now terrified out of her wits, rushed from the room, and in a few moments returned with Mr. Hertslet. He came to me at once and looked at me keenly.

"This is dreadful," I heard him mutter. As he spoke he raised my paralyzed arm and let it fall again. "How did this happen, Nurse Petre?" he asked.

Again I tried to speak—my lips moved, but no sound escaped them.

"Ring for Nurse Martha, and get her into bed at once," said Mr. Hertslet, turning to the servant. "This is a case of apoplexy. What a dreadful thing! I will be back in a few minutes."

The servant helped me to undress, and rang the bell for the other nurse. They soon got me into bed. In about a quarter of an hour Mr. Hertslet returned with another doctor. They both examined me carefully.

"There is no doubt what is the matter," said the fresh doctor, turning to the surgeon. "Hemorrhage from the left middle cerebral, with hemiplegia and aphasia. Rather curious in so young a girl," he continued. "I have only seen two or three cases at her age. One of your own nurses, too, you tell me. Very sad indeed. The mind is fully conscious, but all power of speech is lost. Broca's convolution is evidently involved."

"Can you raise your right arm?" he said, bending down over me.

I shook my head at his question.

"You see she understands what is said to her," he added, looking at Mr. Hertslet.

Some directions were given to the nurse, who had remained in the room, and then both the doctors went out. I could hear them talking outside for a few moments, then they went downstairs. Presently Mr. Hertslet returned. He sent Nurse Martha out of the room and bent down over me.

"You see," he said, speaking in his usual

quiet, deliberate tone, "how wrongly you acted not to yield to my reasonable terms last night. You made a mistake, and are suffering the consequences. I told you that if you did not agree to my conditions I should seal your lips. I have done so."

Once more I made a frantic effort to answer, but not a word would come.

"You injure yourself by the emotion which you exhibit," he said. "Now, listen. I intend to marry Miss Trefusis, and in order to do so I have taken steps to insure your silence. In all probability you will never speak again. With my immense knowledge of the localization of motor centres of the brain, it was easy for me to do what I have done. When I saw you try to leave the house last night I made up my mind. I waited until you dropped asleep, then I administered an anæsthetic. The rest was easy. With a suitable instrument I made a small opening through the bone at the top of your temple, just over the centre which controls the power of speech. Having made the hole through the bone, I introduced a probe and broke up that portion of the brain tissue. The external opening is scarcely visible. You are supposed to be suffering from cerebral hemorrhage. You may by-and-by rise from your bed, but you cannot speak, nor can you control your brain sufficiently to write anything, even with your left hand. Thus you are as powerless to convey the information which you know to Leonora Trefusis as if you were dead."

He paused for a moment, then he continued:—

"You will like to know everything, and I am willing to tell you. Having performed the operation, I placed you with your head beside the sharp corner of the fender, and upon it smeared a little blood. You may call attention to the small wound on your head, by making signs to the nurse, but she has been told that the wound was caused by your fall."

Having said the last words he turned and left the room.

I lay perfectly motionless in my bed. The nurse had little or nothing to do for me. All I wished for was to be alone. My active brain, revolving ever and ever round one problem, brought torture to the point of madness. I knew that I was doomed; I was chained as if in iron: I, in my first youth, was doomed to the silence of the grave. Mr. Hertslet would marry Leonora; Captain Gifford would probably die.

These thoughts, sweeping by in grim procession, tortured me day and night, day and night.

At last, about a week after my seizure, Leonora came to see me. She looked very pale and sad, and when she entered the room and noticed the change in my face she burst into tears.

"Oh, my poor darling!" she exclaimed, "how dreadful you look!" As she spoke she flung herself on her knees by my side.



"OH, MY POOR DARLING!"

"Get up, Leonora," said a voice, which I had learned to dread with an unutterable horror. Mr. Hertslet had entered the room.

"This emotion is bad for you, and bad also for the patient," he added.

"Paul, will she never speak again?" asked the girl.

"It is unlikely, but we must hope for the best."

"She looks so anxious and pathetic," said Miss Trefusis. "Watch her eyes—they are full of a question. She is longing to tell us something. Perhaps she can write it."

"Try her," said Mr. Hertslet. As he spoke he crossed the room, and took a sheet of paper and pencil and brought them to my side.

"Try with your left hand," he said, quietly.

I glanced up at him and made a frantic effort. All in vain. My brain directed the words, but the hand would not obey its

master. I could only effect a few straggling lines on the paper.

"She cannot," said the surgeon, looking at Leonora; "it tortures her to try."

He put the paper back again; Leonora bent over me and kissed me.

"Rest quietly, darling," she said. "After I am married you shall live with me—I will nurse you and love you; I will try to do a little for you because of the much you did for me."

Then she left the room, her tears still falling.

Some more weeks went by—there was no change in my condition. In those weeks I had learned what despair meant. A certain morning dawned; I awoke feeling strangely better. I could not account for my sensations, but I felt lighter and less heavy-limbed. I observed, too, that I could move my arm—the paralysis was evidently passing away. Once again I made an effort to speak, but not

a word would come. Still, the paralysis of the arm and side was less marked.

When the nurse came into the room I longed to say to her "I am better," but I think my eyes must have told her something, for she bent over me and said, cheerily:—

"Oh, come, you are looking more like yourself."

I raised my arm about an inch in order to draw her attention to it.

"This is splendid," she said; "I must tell Mr. Hertslet." She stood at the bottom of the bed as if considering.

"I do not know that I ought to trouble him to-day," she said; "this is his wedding-day. Why, nurse, what a queer expression you have in your face. You have got such strange eyes—I never before saw human eyes express so much. I do not believe you like this wedding. Well, Miss Trefusis is a

beautiful young lady, but then Mr. Hertslet is so clever, the cleverest surgeon of his day. Of course, he is older, but still——"

There came a knock at the door, the nurse went to open it. I heard her utter an exclamation, she then came back on tiptoe to my side.

"What do you think has happened?" she said. "You are highly honoured. There is no less a person standing outside than Miss Trefusis—the bride herself. Shall I show her in?"

My eyes spoke, my hand was raised once again. Leonora entered. She was in her bridal dress. Her beauty was extraordinary and startling, but her sweet face was ghastly pale, and her dark eyes were full of an uncontrollable sadness. I motioned with my hand to Nurse Martha to leave us. Leonora came up close to me.

"I hoped you might have been better," she said, bending over me. "I could not go away without seeing you and bidding you good-bye. Yes, I am going to the church now to be married. Ah, nurse, dear nurse, he never came back. I shall be Mrs. Hertslet within an hour."

I motioned with my hand and said with my eyes, "Stay with me for a little. Mine is a dreadful fate—comfort me with your presence just for a few moments."

She seemed to read my thoughts, for without a word she sat down near me. Presently she took my hand and covered it with her kisses. Some of her tears dropped on it. As she sat so, and the quick moments passed, and I knew that in a very short time her fate would be irrevocably sealed, a frantic determination awoke within me. If no words could rise to my lips, at least I could direct my thoughts to the Providence above. I began to pray frantically, despairingly. I began to plead with the Almighty to give me back the gift of speech.

"Let me have it, Lord!" I entreated. "Only for an hour, for half an hour, for a few moments, just in order that I may save her."

As I spoke thus to God the light in my eyes must have been wonderful, for Leonora touched me.

"What is it?" she said; "your eyes seem to speak—there is something troubling you. Oh, nurse, nurse, make an effort. Surely if you make a great, frantic effort you can move that silent tongue."

My heart was beating wildly.

"One word, Lord, even one word," I pleaded, "one word to save her, to prevent a great, a terrible wrong being done."

I moved my lips, the guttural noise came to my throat. Suddenly, with a mighty effort, the blood surging to my temples, I found that my long-disused speech had returned.

"Leonora," I whispered.

"Good heavens! she speaks, she speaks," cried the girl. She fell on her knees and clasped both my hands. "Dear, dearest, tell me what is in your heart."

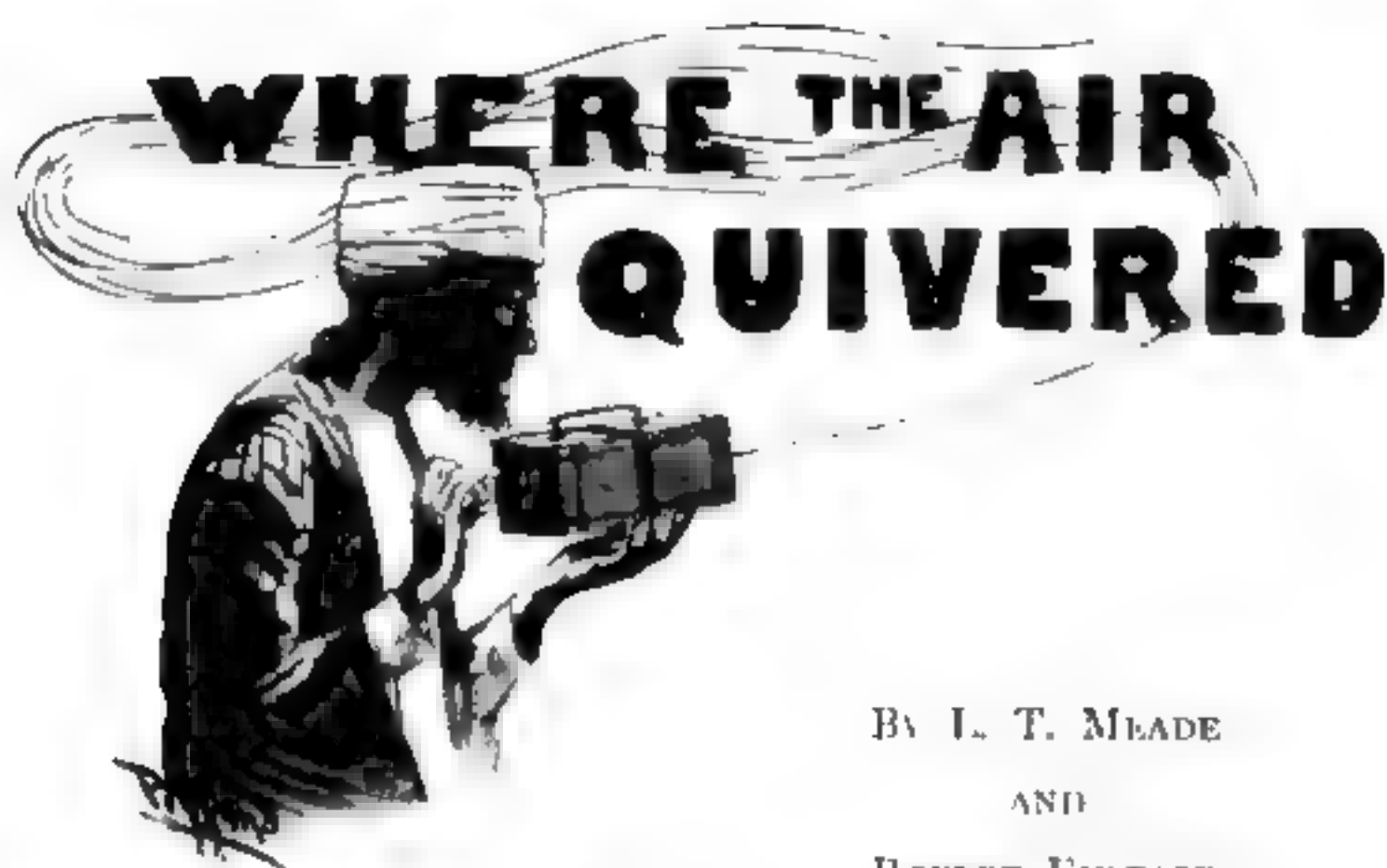
I knew that my words must be few. I had to select them before they were uttered.

"Leonora, listen," I said. "Do not marry Mr. Hertslet. Captain Gifford is in this house. Do not marry that—bad man."

These were all the words I found myself capable of uttering. My brain reeled, the room became dark, I sank away into complete unconsciousness.

I was very ill afterwards, and knew nothing more for a long time. When I came to myself Leonora told me the story of the next few days. Acting on my advice, she went to seek Captain Gifford, and found him. She said little or nothing about that interview, nor did I question her. Mr. Hertslet returned to the house about half an hour after I had recovered my power of speech. Leonora herself met him and told him what had occurred. He looked quietly at her, his face grew white, he went out of the house, never to return. Never again did he come back to Harley Street. I cannot tell what part of the world he is now in, but at least his career in England is at an end. Another great surgeon performed the operation on Captain Gifford, who got better, and tomorrow Leonora is to be his wife.

As for me, I am slowly but completely recovering; the awful silence is over. It was broken in time, thank Heaven!



BY L. T. MEADE

AND

ROBERT EUSTACE.



WHEN my daughter Vivien became engaged to Archie Forbes I naturally took a great interest in the circumstance. Vivien was my only child, and her mother had died at her birth.

She was a handsome, bright, sensible girl, worthy to be the wife of any good fellow, and with as much pluck and common sense as I have ever seen in anyone.

Archie was a landed proprietor on a small scale, and had not a debt in the world; his past was a clean record, and his future was as bright as health, intelligence, and a fair amount of money could make it. He was devotedly attached to Vivien, and I gave my hearty consent to the engagement.

I am a doctor by profession, and thoroughly enjoy the life. In the ordinary course of things the physician comes into close contact with the stranger and rarer forms of human nature, and being myself a lover of all that is out of the common, this outlook weighed with me in my choice. After many years of hard work I secured an enormous practice, and when I settled down as a specialist in Harley Street I was already a wealthy man.

On a certain warm evening in June I sat smoking at the open window of my dining-room when Vivien entered.

She held a telegram in her hand.

"This has just come," she cried, in some excitement; "it is from Archie. He has returned, and will be here this evening."

She sat down as she spoke on the edge of the table, and put her slim hand affectionately on my shoulder.

"You won't be sorry to see him, Vi, will you?" was my answer.

"Sorry!" she cried. "I cannot tell you how thankful I am! You never supposed I was nervous, did you, father; but the fact is, I hated Archie going away with Jack Fletcher. Oh, I know that Jack is a right good fellow, but he is terribly wild and daring. Lately I have had most uncomfortable dreams about both of them. Yes, it is a relief to get this telegram. Archie promises to call about ten o'clock; how nice it will be to see him again!"

Her bright eyes sparkled as she spoke, and into them stole that radiant look which girls wear when they speak of the man they love best on earth.

"Ah! Vivien," I answered, "there are two sides to every question. Archie will be taking you away, and what shall I do?"

"You will have another home to go to," she replied; but her face suddenly became grave.

"I wonder what their adventures have been," she said, a moment later.

"They will tell you themselves before another hour is out," I answered. I glanced, as I spoke, at a small clock on the mantel piece. Vivien gave a quick sigh and stood up. She was in full evening dress, of some soft, white texture, and wore a bunch of yellow roses at her belt.

"Aunt Mary wishes me to go with her to Lady Farrell's reception," she said; "but I will be back, if possible, within the hour."

"Well, go, my dear, and enjoy yourself," I answered, standing up and kissing her. "If Archie should arrive before you are back, I will get him to wait."

She slowly left the room. I lay back in my chair and thought over my girl's prospects. The moments flew quickly. Shortly after ten o'clock I heard the hall-door bell ring, and the next instant Archie burst into the room.

"Here you are, old fellow, and you are welcome," I said, grasping him by the hand.

He came to me hurriedly; his dress was in considerable disorder, and his face wore a wild and terribly disturbed expression. To my hearty grip of the hand he scarcely responded.

"Is anything wrong?" I said, giving him a quick glance.

"I am in awful trouble," was the reply. "Is Vivien in?"

"No, she is out with her aunt, but she got your telegram, and will be back almost immediately."

"I cannot see her; not just yet. Do you mind if I lock the door?"

"What is wrong, my dear fellow?"

"Oh, I am in terrible trouble," he repeated. He strode across the room as he spoke, turned the key in the lock, and then sank into the nearest chair.

"I want your advice and help badly, Dr. Kennedy," he continued.

"But, my dear boy, what is the matter? What has happened?"

He raised his sunburnt face and looked at me gravely.

"Poor Jack is dead," he said then, in a broken sort of voice.

"Jack Fletcher!" I cried, springing to my feet.

"Yes, he died an hour ago, quite suddenly, at the Savoy Hotel, in his room. We got into London all right at six o'clock, and drove off to the Savoy at once. I never saw Jack in better spirits. We went to our rooms and had a wash and sat down to dinner at half-past seven. At half-past eight he went to his room for something. He did not come back, and after a time I followed him. I found his door locked and called to him, but he made no reply. In great alarm I went for help, and we had the door burst open. Jack was lying on the floor. Everything was done, of course. A doctor happened to be in the house, who applied all the usual restoratives, but it was too late; he was quite dead. My God, it is awful! I don't seem able to think. You must think for me, and come to the Savoy at once to see to things. What can have caused his death? You will come round, won't you?"

"Yes, I'll come," I replied. "I'll just scribble a note to Vivien first. It is fearfully sad. Death must have been caused by heart failure, of course."

I scribbled a few words on a card, laid it on the table to be given to my daughter, and then went into the hall. A few moments later Archie and I were on our way in a hansom to the Savoy.

"Of course, there will be an inquest," he said, "and you will be present, won't you, Dr. Kennedy? The death must have been due to natural causes."

"Why, of course," I answered, looking round at him in some surprise. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing," he said, "only it



"JACK WAS LYING ON THE FLOOR."

seems so strange. He was in the best of health and spirits."

"All the same, there may have been lesion of the heart," I answered; "but we shall soon know. You say you found the door of his room locked?"

"Yes, fast, and the key was within; the window was open, though."

"What had that to do with it?"

"Nothing." Archie hung his head. Painful as the occasion was, his gloom and depression seemed greater than the circumstance warranted.

We soon reached the hotel. I saw poor Fletcher's body. Until a post-mortem was made it was impossible to tell the cause of death, so I superintended all the details of the removal, sent off a wire and letter to the poor fellow's mother in Lancashire, and then rejoined Archie in his private sitting-room. I found him pacing up and down the room, a wild gleam in his eye, a restlessness about his manner which I had never observed before. Once more I thought that Jack Fletcher's death could scarcely account for the disordered state of his whole appearance.

"You must pull yourself together, my boy," I said. "Men have died suddenly before now. Of course it is fearfully sad, but you have got Vivien to think of."

"I don't want to see her to-night," he said, eagerly.

"Why so?" I asked.

"She must be acquainted with the fact of Jack's death; it will upset her, and I—the fact is, I am completely done up; I don't know myself, doctor."

"Nor do I know you, Archie, in your present state. You must pull yourself together; and I tell you what, the very best thing you can do is to come away with me, and let us put you up for the night. Vivien will naturally expect to see you, whatever has happened, and the sooner you unburden your mind to her the better."

"My nerves are shaken to bits," he replied. "I have the strangest feeling about this whole matter. There is a cloud over me. The fact is, I don't believe Vivien and I will ever be married."

"Oh, nonsense, my dear fellow; come and have a talk with my sensible, matter-of-fact girl, and you will feel a new man. I am not going to leave you here, so come at once."

I got him to do so, but evidently with extreme unwillingness.

When we got home Vivien was waiting for us. She came into the hall. One glance into her face caused Archie to change colour.

He went up to her, kissed her, took her hand, and then dropped it again.

"Something very sad has happened, Vivien," I remarked, "and Archie wants to tell you. Take him into your private room, my love, and have a good talk."

"Come, Archie, this way," said the girl. She led him down one of the corridors, opened the door of her own sitting room, and closed it behind them.

"This is a queer affair," I could not help murmuring to myself. "Strange and disastrous as Jack Fletcher's death is, I am more disturbed about Archie. What can be the matter with him?"

The next day, with the consent of the coroner, I assisted at the autopsy. I need not go into details, but merely state at once that, after two hours' careful and most minute investigation, the cause of Jack Fletcher's death still remained an absolute mystery. Every organ was sound, there was no wound anywhere, and not a trace of poison was discovered. Dr. Benjamin Curtis, the skilled pathologist and analyst, was present, and the last sentence of his exhaustive report I append herewith:—

"There is absolutely nothing to account for the cause of death; and the only remaining alternative is that it was probably due to some very severe nervous shock of central origin, the nature of which is wholly obscure."

I flung the report down in annoyance, and went to meet Archie, who was waiting for me outside the coroner's court. I told him what Dr. Curtis had said. To my astonishment his face turned ashy white, and he almost reeled as he walked.

"Then it is as I thought," he said.

"What do you think?" I said. "Forbes, you are keeping something from us; you have something on your mind. What is wrong?"

"Nothing, nothing," he said, hurriedly. "I hoped the coroner would find a cause for death. Dr. Curtis's report has upset me."

I asked a few more questions, and felt now absolutely convinced that Forbes was concealing something. Whatever it was, he was determined to keep it to himself. I went home considerably troubled.

A week after poor Jack's funeral, Vivien came into my consulting room. Archie had only been to the house once, and on that occasion he could not be got to say a word with regard to their approaching marriage.

"Now, father," said my girl, closing the door, and coming up and planting herself in front of me, "there is something wrong, and you have got to find out what it is."

I looked full into her eyes; they were brighter than usual, and had a suspicion of tears about them.

"Archie is terribly changed," she said; "you must have noticed it."

"I have," I answered, in a low tone.

"I know he was very much attached to Jack," continued Vivien, "but this is no ordinary grief. There is something terrible weighing on his mind. If I did not know that he was a thoroughly brave fellow, I should say that he was oppressed by a fearful sense of overmastering fear. It cannot be that. What, then, can it be?"

I made no answer. She continued to stand upright before me, and to keep her eyes fixed on my face.

"What can it be?" she repeated. "I puzzle myself over the whole thing day and night. I don't believe he is tired of me."

"Assuredly that is not the case," was my quick response.

"But all the same, he is completely changed," she continued. "Before he went on this cruise, he was devoted to me—each moment in my presence was paradise to him—now it may be likened to purgatory. He is restless until he gets away from me. When he is with me he is unhappy and *distract*. In short, there is something terribly wrong, and you must help me to find out what it is."

"Ask him yourself, my dear. I have seen just what you have seen, but cannot get him to say a word."

"I am glad you agree with me," she said, the gloom of her brow lightening for a moment. "I will write to him at once and ask him to come here."

She had scarcely said the words before the door was opened and Forbes himself came in.

"Ah, that's right, Archie," I cried, in a tone of relief. "Come over here, dear fellow, and sit down. The fact is, Vivien is thoroughly unhappy. She sees that there is something wrong with you, and is discontented with the present state of matters. You have something on your mind, and you ought to tell us what it is."

Forbes raised two lack-lustre eyes and fixed them on the girl's face. The tears which were close to her grey eyes now brimmed over.

"Archie," she said, going up to him and laying her hand on his shoulder, "I want to ask you a plain question. Would you like our engagement to be broken off?"

"I was coming here to propose it, Vivien," was his strange reply.

She turned very white, and fell back as if someone had dealt her a blow.

"Good God!" she said. "It is then as I feared: there is something terribly wrong."

"It is not that I do not love you as much as ever," continued the poor fellow; "but I have no right to bind you to me. I scarcely dare to tell you what has happened. I am unworthy of you, Vivien, and besides, I am doomed. It is only a matter of time."

He flung himself into the nearest

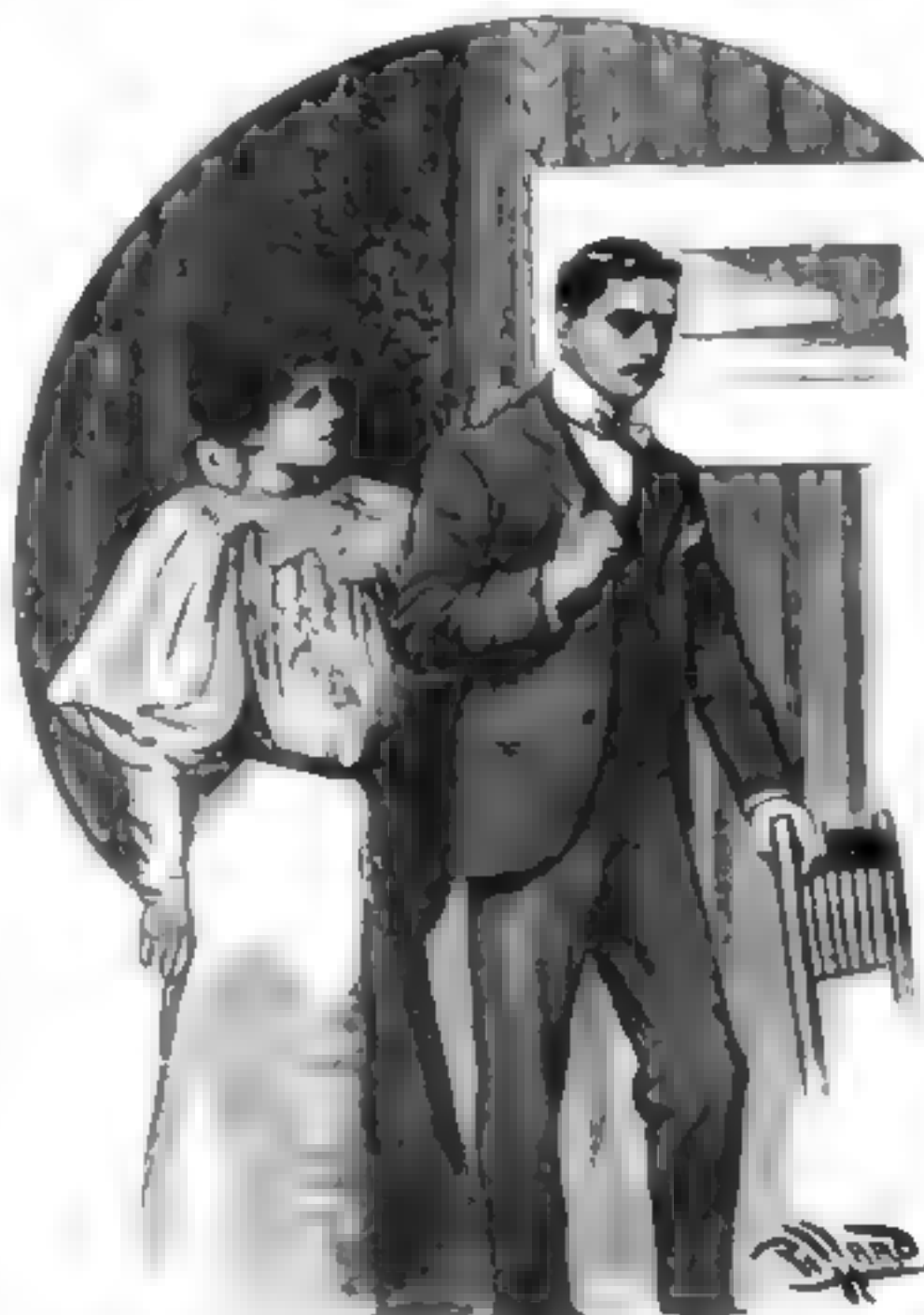
chair, and covered his face with two hands which trembled from nervous terror.

I nodded to Vivien.

"You had better leave him with me for a few moments," I said.

"No, I will not," she answered, desperately. "I have a right to know the truth, and I am determined to get at it. What is wrong, Archie? You are not tired of me? You still love me, don't you?"

"With all my heart and soul," he groaned.



“ARCHIE,” SHE SAID, “I WANT TO ASK YOU A PLAIN QUESTION.”

"And yet you want our engagement to be broken off! Why?"

"Because I am a guilty and doomed man," was his reply.

I started and felt my heart beat. Was it possible? But, no—I flung the unworthy suspicion from me.

"I ought not to be in this house," continued Archie. "I ought not to have let you kiss me the night we came home. I am unworthy of you, and yet . . . My God! this misery is driving me mad."

He pushed back the hair from his forehead; there were beads of perspiration on his brow.

"If we were engaged fifty times over, our wedding would never come off," he continued, speaking in the most reckless, excited tone. "I can no more prevent the fate which is hanging over me, than I can get rid of that thing which has stained me. I can only say this: As Jack died so I shall die. I am doomed, and the less you have to say to me the better."

"Now, that is all nonsense," she said, in her quick way, which could, at times of intense emotion, be wonderfully matter-of-fact, and, therefore, soothing. "Whatever you have done you must tell me and you must tell father, and you must allow us to judge as to whether it is a barrier between you and me or not. As to my love, you must have a very poor opinion of it if you think I would forsake you in an hour of trouble. Women who care for a man do not leave him when he is down. I am a woman, and, I hope, a brave one. I mean to comfort you, and to stay by you to the last, whatever has happened; yes, *whatever* has happened."

He looked at her with incredulous eyes, into which just a flicker of hope returned.

"You cannot mean it?" he cried.

"Yes, I do mean it; but I want your whole confidence, and so does father. You are concealing something. You must tell us at once."

"Yes, speak, Archie," I said, gravely. "Vivien, my girl, come here and stand by me. Archie, this is no ordinary case. Vivien and I will deal with you with all fairness, only we must know the absolute truth."

"I meant to tell you some days ago," said Archie, fixing his eyes on my face, "but somehow I could not get the pluck. The whole thing is so horrible, and the burden on my conscience so great, that I am overcome by a ghastly fear. I cannot fight against it."

"Well, speak," I said, with impatience.

"It is the queerest thing on earth," he said, slowly. "It has half stunned me. Though I consider myself pretty tough, the whole thing has knocked the pluck clean out of me."

He paused to wet his dry lips, and continued:—

"You know we were in the Mediterranean cruising about for six weeks?"

I nodded.

"We were just about to come home, when Fletcher, who was always up to a lark, suggested that we should go through the Canal, down to Jeddah, and then on to Mecca, to see the pilgrims. They would be all there, as it was the twelfth month of the Mohammedan year. I did not mind, so we went. We left the yacht at Jeddah, and went on to Mecca. The place was one mass of pilgrims. They were on their way to the Kaaba, the oblong stone building within the great Mosque. You have heard of it, of course, and also of the famous lava-like Black Stone, to which all Moslems turn in their prayers. It was in the north-east corner of the building. The place was in a sort of uproar, for it is part of the faith of every good Moslem to kiss that stone once in the course of his life. Well, Dr. Kennedy, you would scarcely believe it, but Fletcher, when he got into the midst of this throng, seemed to turn quite mad. He lost his head, and insisted that we should go and see the whole show. He intended to kiss the Black Stone, if he could. Of course, I knew we should run into the most fearful danger, and did my best to dissuade him, but nothing would do; go he would. He said to me:—

"You may stay away, old boy; you are engaged to be married, and perhaps ought to consider your life a little bit, but with me it is different. When I want a lark, I must have it at all risks. I am going; you can please yourself."

"Of course, I didn't relish running the risk of being torn to pieces, but I wasn't the fellow to see him start off alone, so at last I agreed to go with him. We put on the *Ithram*, the woollen thing worn by the Arabs round the waist and shoulders, got some sandals, and went bare-headed with the crowd of pilgrims to the Mosque. We joined the procession and managed to get right inside, and Jack got inside the Kaaba and went up to the north-east corner of the building and kissed the Black Stone. He told me afterwards that it is quite worn away

with the kisses of millions of human beings. I missed him in the crowd, and just as I was looking round to see where he could have got to, I noticed one of the Mueddins, or priests, watching me closely, and when his eyes met mine, I can tell you I shuddered. From the moment they singled me out he seemed never to take his gaze away, and I shall not, to my dying day, forget the expression of cruel, fierce suspicion that was stamped on his face, which was rendered hideous by being deeply pitted with small-pox.

"Well, Jack turned up, and we got out all right; and Jack, poor fellow! was in the best of spirits. He said it was the biggest lark he had ever enjoyed, and he did nothing but laugh at my fears. I told him about the priest, and said I was certain we had been discovered, but he made nothing of it.

"When we got out we were in an awful crowd, and our donkeys could scarcely move. We had just cleared the thickest of the mob, and I was hoping we were safe, when I noticed the priest, who had already observed me in the Mosque, detach himself from the crowd and move swiftly towards us. It was now nearly dark. I saw that he wanted to speak and, not knowing why I did it, reined in my donkey. He came up to my side. In his left hand he held a parchment scroll, and as I took it I saw his right hand steal down to his belt. There was the flash of steel. In an instant I should have been stabbed. I do not know what came over me; there was a ringing in my ears, and my head seemed to swim. I leant quickly over the donkey and plunged my long hunting knife with all my force into the man's heart.

He fell without a groan. I touched Jack on the arm. We galloped madly and for our lives. The mob followed us, but we out-paced them, and at last their howls and shouts grew fainter and fainter behind us. We reached Jeddah in safety, got on board, and steamed away with all possible speed.

"'Why in the name of Heaven did you kill him, Archie?' said Jack to me then.

"'He would have killed us if we had not killed him,' was my reply, but while I spoke there was a dead-weight at my heart, and wherever I turned I seemed to see the dying

eyes of the man, and to hear the thud of his body as he fell to the ground.

"'Have you got the parchment he put into your hand?' continued Jack.

"I had. He took it from me and opened it. It had some writing on it in Arabic, which we could both read and speak. Jack copied it out in English, and here it is."

As he spoke Archie produced from his pocket-book a piece of parchment and an old



"HE FELL WITHOUT A GROAN."

envelope, and read as follows:—

"The vengeance of Muhomet rests upon the two infidels and unbelievers who have profaned the Prophet. Their days are numbered, and before the sun rise on the Festival of Eed-Al Kurban in the month of Dsul Heggch they will be no more."

"There," said Archie, standing up, "that is what was written; and now, Dr. Kennedy, that I have had courage to tell you my story, I want to ask you a question. Do you think it is within the bounds of probability, or even possibility, that poor Fletcher's sudden death could have had any connection with this affair?"

"Absolutely out of the question," was my first remark, but then I paused to think the situation over.

"You certainly did a mad thing," I said then; "not only did you profane the religious rights of these fanatics, but you, in especial, killed one of their priests. Under such circumstances there is little doubt that they would do much to compass their revenge, but that they would follow you both to England seems on the face of it ridiculous. No, no, Archie; it is an unpleasant business, and I am sorry you did not tell me before, but that Jack's death has anything to do with that paper is the wildest fiction."

"I do not believe you," he answered. "I am firmly convinced that the Mueddin whom I killed will be revenged. Jack is already dead and the words of the prophecy will come, true with regard to me. I shall not live after sunrise on the festival of Eed-Al-Kurban, whenever that is."

While he was speaking Vivien had remained absolutely quiet. She went up to him now, and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Why do you touch me?" he said, starting away from her. "I have that man's blood on my hands."

"You did it in self-defence," she answered. "But we must not think of that at all now. Father"—she turned to me—"I agree with Archie: I believe that his life is in grave danger. We must save him; that is our present business. Nothing else can be thought of until his life is safe."

"I have one thing more to say," continued Archie. "Last night I saw one of the Mueddins in London. I knew him; I could not mistake him; he resembled the priest I had killed. He was standing under a lamp-post, opposite St. George's Hospital. He fixed his eyes on my face. I believe he is the man who compassed poor Jack's death, and mine is only a matter of time."

"Come, come, this is nonsense," I answered. "Fletcher was not murdered."

"What did he die of?" asked Archie, gloomily. "You say yourself that he was thoroughly healthy; he was in the prime of youth. Do healthy men in the prime of youth die suddenly without any discoverable cause? I ask you a straight question."

"The death was a strange one," I could not help replying.

"Very strange," echoed Vivien, "strange enough," she added, "to account for Archie's fears. The Moslems have threatened the deaths of both Archie and Jack. Jack is dead. Archie is the most guilty man of the two, for he killed their priest. They will certainly not leave a stone unturned to kill him."

"Yes, my days are numbered," said Forbes; "there is no getting over the fact. Vivien, our engagement must come to an end, and in any case I feel now that I have no right to marry you."

Vivien's brows contracted in a nervous frown.

"We will not talk of our marriage at present," she said, with some impatience; "but why should we not consult Dr. Khan?"

"Dr. Khan!" I cried. "Do you mean the Persian?"

"Yes; why should not we all three go to him at once? He knows much more about these Arabs and their queer ways and their sorceries than anyone else in London."

"Upon my word, it is a capital idea," I said. "Khan does know strange things, and is up to all the lore of the East. He is in some ways one of the cleverest fellows I know. He does not practise, but he has gone in for chemical research and forensic medicine as a hobby. There is no one in London whose opinion would be of more value in a difficult case like the present, and, being a Mohammedan by religion, he can help us with the side issues of this most extraordinary affair. Archie, you have got to pull yourself together, my boy, if for no other reason, for Vivien's sake. Come, we will go down to Professor Khan's chambers in Gray's Inn at once, and tell him the whole story."

"And Dr. Khan is a special friend of mine," said Vivien, brightly. "Oh, now that we are doing something to help you, Archie, I can live."

I crossed the room to order the carriage. As I did so I heard Archie say to her, in a low tone:—

"And you love me still?"

"I love you still," was her reply.

He drew himself up; the colour returned to his ashen cheeks and the light to his eyes.

In half an hour we were all driving to Hussein Khan's chambers, in Gray's Inn. When we reached them I rang the outer bell. It seemed ages before anyone came. At last the door was opened by an old housekeeper, in his shirt sleeves. He recognised me, and nodded when I spoke to him.

"Is Dr. Khan in?" I asked.

"Yes, sir; you know your way," was the answer.

We hurried up the uncarpeted stairs to the second floor, and pressed the electric bell. There was the sound of the latch

being drawn back inside; I pushed the panel, and we all three entered; the door closed automatically behind us, and stretched on the sofa at the far end of a long room, in a loose dressing-gown and slippers, lay the Persian. He was smoking a long opium pipe. The moment his eyes

Archie told his strange tale. While he spoke I closely watched the effect on my friend; but, once the narrative had begun, the expression on the Persian's face never altered. After that first glance of interest, it had settled down into a stolid, Oriental indifference.



"THE PERSIAN."

rested upon Vivien he put down the pipe and stood up. He looked us all over with heavy, lustreless eyes, and nodded slowly. He was evidently only half awake.

"I am sorry to disturb you, Professor," I said, apologetically. "You know my daughter, of course?"

Vivien came forward and offered her hand. Khan bent over it, and then raised it respectfully to his lips.

"I have not forgotten Miss Vivien," he said.

"I have come here to-day because I am in great trouble, and because I want your advice," she said at once. "It has to do with this gentleman. May I introduce him? Mr. Forbes—Dr. Khan."

Dr. Khan slowly turned his heavy eyes in Archie's direction. He looked him all over from head to foot, and then, rather to my astonishment, I observed a lightning look of intelligence and remarkable interest fill his eyes.

"Has the trouble anything to do with Mr. Forbes?" he said, glancing at Vivien.

"It has."

"Then I believe I may help you. Sit down, sir, pray, and tell me at once what is the matter."

"What do you think of it all?" I said, as Archie ceased to speak.

"Let me examine the parchment, please," he replied, with deliberate composure.

Archie gave it to him. He took it and read it over and over again, muttering the words to himself.

"You could find no cause for your friend's death?"

"None."

"You are quite certain, Mr. Forbes, that the man you saw yesterday outside St. George's Hospital was one of the Mueddins whom you had already noticed in the Mosque?"

"Quite."

"Well, my dear friend, I am sorry to say it looks a very queer business."

"And do you really believe that Jack's death was the work of the Mueddin?" I cried, aghast at his words.

"No; I only say that it is quite possible. I recall a similar case; the same thing may happen again. The Arabians, upon whose early researches the whole science of Europe was founded, possess, of course, secrets unknown to our Western scientists of the present day. I have seen some strange things done by them. The act of sacrilege

you both committed was one of the gravest offences possible, but it is just within the realm of possibility that such a crime might have been looked over; but as you, my friend, killed one of the priests as well, the Moham-medans whom you so deeply insulted would not leave a stone unturned to compass your end. The marvel is that you escaped immediate death. But now let us quite clearly sum up the position as it stands."

As he spoke the Persian stood up. He remained quiet for a moment thinking deeply, then he crossed the room and took down a volume in Arabic from a shelf. With pencil and paper he began working some calculations, referring now and then to an almanac, and once to a map of Asia.

We all three watched him in intense silence. After a moment or two he looked up.

"Assuming for the sake of argument that the Mueddin whom you saw last night has undertaken this work of revenge," he continued, "the position is this. Owing to the Arabs' year being a lunar one, the festival of Eed-Al-Kurban does not occur at the same date each year. I see, however, that it will commence according to our calendar to-morrow, the 8th of June, at daybreak, or Subh. At daybreak or Subh the first call to prayer is given by the Mueddin from the Mosque. Now, Mecca is exactly 40deg. longitude east of Greenwich, and, therefore, day will break with them two hours and forty minutes earlier than with us—that is, at seven minutes past one o'clock to-morrow morning. Of course, the Mueddin, whom you believe to have followed you, would know all this. And as, according to the words on the parchment, you are both to be dead *before* sunrise on the festival of Eed-Al-Kurban, so also, *failing* the fulfilment of this vow, you are perfectly safe when that hour has passed."

"Then you believe that Archie is in grave

danger until after one o'clock to-morrow morning?" exclaimed Vivien.

"That is my belief," answered Dr. Khan, bowing to her.

"But all this is most unsatisfactory," I cried, getting up. "Surely, Dr. Khan, even granted that it is as you say, we can easily protect Forbes. He has but to stay quietly at home until the hour of danger is past. These Arabs are not magicians: they cannot hurt a man in his own house, for instance?"

"How was it your friend died?" said the Persian, looking full into Archie's face.

"That I cannot say," was the reply.

Dr. Khan shrugged his shoulders.

"You declare that the Arabs are not magicians," he said, turning to me, "but that is just the point. They *are*! I can tell you things which I have seen with my own eyes which happened in Arabia that you would find hard to believe."

"Very likely," I answered, "but they require the Oriental stage and surroundings for the exhibition of the so-called phenomena. They cannot use magic within the four mile radius of Charing Cross, under the vigilant eye of the Metropolitan police."

Dr. Khan did not immediately answer. He remained motionless in deep thought.

"What do you intend to do to-night?" he said then, turning to Archie.

"I have made no plans," was the low, indifferent reply. "I am so certain of my impending end," he continued, "that nothing seems to make any difference."

"You must come home with us, Archie," cried Vivien. "Dr. Khan declares that after one o'clock you are safe. Until one o'clock you must be with us; and suppose, Dr. Khan," she added, "you come too? Suppose we spend this momentous evening together? What do you say, father?"

Before I could answer the Persian said, slowly,



"THE PERSIAN WORKING ON HIS CALCULATIONS"

"I was going to ask you to invite me. Yes, I will come, with pleasure."

"One more question," said Vivien; "you do firmly believe that Archie will be safe *after* one o'clock to-morrow morning?"

"Yes; the words on the parchment point distinctly to his death on or before the commencement of the festival. The Mohammedans keep their vows to the letter, or not at all."

As he spoke Dr. Khan got up slowly, went into his bedroom, and reappeared ready dressed for the evening. It was already nearly seven o'clock. We got into my carriage and returned to Harley Street. I sent a servant for Archie's evening dress to the hotel, and at eight o'clock we found ourselves seated round the dinner-table. It was a strange and silent meal, and I do not think we any of us had much appetite.

I am naturally not a superstitious man, but matters were sufficiently queer and out-of-the-way to excite a certain foreboding which I could neither account for nor dismiss. The Persian looked utterly calm and indifferent, as betokened his race. But I noticed that from time to time he fixed his deep-set, brilliant eyes on Forbes's haggard face, as if he would read him through.

The night happened to be the hottest of that year. There was not a breath of air, and the heat inside the house was stifling.

When dinner was over, Vivien suggested that we should go into my smoking-room. The house was a corner one, and the windows of the smoking-room were on the ground floor, and looked into a side street.

She seated herself by Archie's side. He took little or no notice of her. Khan continued to give him anxious glances from time to time. Vivien was restless, often rising from her seat.

"Sit down, Miss Vivien," said Dr. Khan, suddenly. "I know exactly what you feel, but the time will soon pass. Let me tell you something interesting."

She shook her head. It was almost beyond her power to listen. The gloomy face of her lover, the slightly bent figure which had been so athletic and upright, the change in the whole man, absorbed her entire attention.

"Save him—give him back to me

if you can," was the unspoken wish in her eyes, as they fixed themselves for a moment on Dr. Khan's face.

He gave her a strange smile, and then turning addressed me. He was the most brilliant talker I ever met, and on this occasion he roused all the power of his great intellect to make his conversation interesting. He related some of his own experiences in the East, and made many marvellous revelations with regard to modern science.

Eleven and twelve chimed from a neighbouring church clock. Soon after midnight the Persian, who had been silent for several moments, said, suddenly, "During this last hour of suspense, I should like to put out the electric light."

As he spoke he crossed the room, and was about to switch off the current when our attention was suddenly attracted to Vivien. She had sunk back in her seat with a deep sigh. The intense heat of the room had been too much for her.

"Air! Air!" I cried.

Archie laid his hand on the heavy sash of one of the windows and raised it. There seemed to be a hush everywhere—I had never known so still a night. But just at



"HE REARED AND CLETTED WILDEY AT THE LISTEN OF THE
W. NOON

that instant I saw—or fancied I saw—the tassel of the blind move, as though the air had quivered.

The next instant Khan uttered a sharp cry.

"He is there—he has done it—I thought so!"

The words died on his lips, for Archie Forbes reeled, clutched wildly at the lintel of the window, and then with a heavy thud lay like a log on the floor.

I had always looked upon the Persian as a man of exceptional promptitude and great strength of character, but never for a moment had I realized his lightning grasp of an emergency.

"Artificial respiration—don't lose a moment. Take his chest, man; we shall save him!" he cried. As he spoke he leapt through the open window, vaulted the railings, and was in the street.

The shock acted upon Vivien like a charm. With her assistance I tore open Forbes's collar and shirt, and began apply-

gasp. It was followed by another. We redoubled our efforts and waited for a moment. Forbes began to breathe again; we drew back and dashed the sweat from our streaming faces.

"He will do now," whispered Khan; "leave him quiet."

"What is it? For God's sake, what is it?" I said, as soon as I could get my voice to speak.

"I will tell you. This has been the most dastardly and awful thing. I have been trying to get at the solution the whole evening, and just grasped it as Mr. Forbes stood up to open that window. I was too late. He got what they meant for him, but he will do. Yes, his pulse is stronger."

I laid my hand on the victim's wrist: the beats came more regularly each moment, though he was still only half-conscious.

"But what can it be?" I cried; "what have you discovered?"

Khan's eyes were blazing with excitement.

"What has happened?" I continued. "A



"I TORE OPEN FORBES'S COLLAR."

ing artificial respiration with all my might. In less than a minute the Persian came back. He carried a small box in his hand.

"The solution of the mystery," he said. "I will explain presently. Now to save him. I believe we shall do it."

He fell on his knees and helped me with the artificial respiration with all his might. For five long minutes there was not the slightest result. Then there came a feeble

bullet through the brain could not have been more instantaneous; but, silent and unseen, before our very eyes the blow fell and left no trace. This is magic with a vengeance."

"I will explain it," said Khan. "I have been hammering out the solution all the evening, and, fool that I was, never suspected the real thing until just too late. Look here—here is something that your modern scientific criminal has never dreamt of."

"But what the deuce is it?" I said, examining a small box in much bewilderment which Khan now placed in my hands. Three of the sides and the top and bottom were made of wood, but across one end was stretched some material which looked like indiarubber. At the opposite end to this was a small circular opening, which could be closed by a hinged flap.

"Explain what this means, for God's sake," I cried. As I spoke I bent my nose towards the box, and instantly was seized by a catching sensation at the back of the throat.

"Ah, you had better not come too close to it," cried Khan. "This box contained the most deadly gas known to modern chemists: the vapour of concentrated anhydrous hydrogen cyanide."

I started back. Well did I know the action of this most infernally potent and deadly gas. Still, the mystery of how the gas reached Forbes was unexplained.

"How was it done?" I cried, staring at Khan in absolute bewilderment.

"Simply in this way," he answered. As he spoke he lit a cigarette, and at the same time laid his hand on the box. "The poison was projected as a vortex ring in the marvellous and mysterious rotational motion which vortex rings assume. This motion can be imparted to gas, but even scientists of the present day cannot explain it, although the study has given rise to Thompson's fascinating theory on the constitution of matter. All we know is this," continued Khan, "that, projected by the operator, a ring of that gas would move through the air as a solid body, and would burst as true as a shot from a rifle, and slay as quickly, only it would be

perfectly silent and invisible. When made with smoke these rings are visible, of course, and we can watch their motion—so." He shot a ring of cigarette smoke from his mouth, and I watched it as it sailed across the room and burst at last into curling wreaths.

"With this apparatus," he continued, pointing to the box, "an enormous velocity could be given to a vortex ring. Even in broad daylight its approach could not be seen, and, breaking on the mouth and nostrils of a man, it would instantly kill him unless artificial respiration were immediately resorted to. Yes," he added, "the modern detective has a lot to learn."

"But the man who did it?" I cried.

"Gone! We shall never see or hear of him again. He must have seen me when I leapt from the window, and dropped the box in his hasty flight. Of course he followed us here, and crept up to the open window. This was the Mueddin's chance—he projected the vortex ring straight into Archie's face. Thank Heaven, the instant remedies employed have saved him. One second's delay, and he must have died."

Forbes had now staggered to a sitting posture, and Vivien had fallen on her knees by his side.

"Leave us alone, father," she said to me; "yes, leave us alone for a little."

And the Persian and I slowly left the room.

My girl is now married to Archie Forbes. She loves him, as only such women can love. He has recovered his manhood and his pluck, but there is a shadow on his face which I think will stay there while he lives.

Followed.

BY L. T. MEADE AND ROBERT EUSTACE.



AM David Ross's wife. I was married to him a month ago. I have lived through the peril and escaped the danger. What I have lived through, how it happened, and why it happened, this story tells.

My maiden name was Flower Dalrymple. I spent my early days on the Continent, travelling about from place to place and learning much of Bohemian life and Bohemian ways. When I was eighteen years of age my father got an appointment in London. We went to live there—my father, my mother, two brothers, a sister, and myself. Before I was twenty I was engaged to David Ross. David was a landed proprietor. He had good means, and was in my eyes the finest fellow in the world. In appearance he was stalwart and broad-shouldered, with a complexion as dark as a gipsy. He had a passionate and almost wild look in his eyes, and his wooing of me was very determined, and I might almost say stormy.

When first he proposed for me I refused him from a curious and unaccountable sense of fear, but that night I was miserable, and when two days after he repeated his offer, I accepted him, for I discovered that, whatever his character, he was the man I could alone love in all the world.

He told me something of his history. His father had died when he was a baby, and he had spent all the intervening years, except when at school and the University, with his mother. His mother's name was Lady Sarah Ross. On her own mother's side she was of Spanish extraction, but she was the daughter of Earl Reighley. She was a great recluse, and David gave me to understand that her character and ways of life were peculiar.

"You must be prepared for eccentricities in connection with my mother," he said. "I see her, perhaps, through rose-coloured spectacles, for she is to me the finest and the most interesting woman, with the exception of yourself, in the world. Her love for me is a very strange and a very deep passion. She has always opposed the idea of my marrying. Until I met you, I have yielded to her very marked wishes in this respect. I can do so no longer. All the

same, I am almost afraid to tell her that we are engaged."

"Your account of your mother is rather alarming," I could not help saying. "Must I live with her after we are married, David?"

"Certainly not," he answered, with some abruptness. "You and I live at my place, Longmore; she goes to the Dower House."

"She will feel being deposed from her throne very acutely," I said.

"It will be our object in life, Flower, not to let her feel it," he answered. "I look forward with the deepest interest to your conquering her, to your winning her love. When you once win it, it is yours for ever."

All the time David was speaking I felt that he was hiding something. He was holding himself in check. With all his pluck and dash and daring, there was a weight on his mind, something which caused him, although he would not admit it, a curious sensation of uneasiness.

We had been engaged for a fortnight when he wrote to Lady Sarah apprising her of the fact. His letter received no answer. After a week, by his request, I wrote to her, but neither did she notice my letter.

At last, a month after our letters were written, I received a very cordial invitation from Lady Sarah. She invited me to spend Christmas with David and herself at Longmore. She apologized for her apparent rudeness in not writing sooner, but said she had not been well. She would give me, she said, a very hearty welcome, and hoped I would visit the old place in the second week in December and remain over Christmas.

"You will have a quiet time," she wrote, "not dull, for you will be with David; but if you are accustomed to London and the ways of society, you must not expect to find them at Longmore."

Of course I accepted her invitation. Our wedding was to take place on the 10th of January. My trousseau was well under way, and I started for Longmore on a certain snowy afternoon, determined to enjoy myself and to like Lady Sarah in spite of her eccentricities.

Longmore was a rambling old place situated on the borders of Salisbury Plain. The house was built in the form of a cross. The

roof was turreted, and there was a tower at one end. The new rooms were in a distant wing. The centre of the cross, forming the body of the house, was very old, dating back many hundreds of years.

David came to meet me at Salisbury. He drove a mail phaeton, and I clambered up to my seat by his side. A pair of thoroughbred black horses were harnessed to the carriage. David touched the arched neck of one of his favourites with his whip, and we flew through the air.

It was a moonlight night, and I looked at David once or twice. I had never regarded him as faultless, but I now saw something in his appearance which surprised me. It was arbitrary and haughty. He had a fierce way of speaking to the man who sat behind. I could guess that his temper was overbearing.

Never mind! No girl could care for David Ross a little. She must love him with all her heart, and soul, and strength, or hate him. I cared for him all the more because of his faults. He was human, interesting, very tender when he chose, and he loved me with a great love.

We arrived at Longmore within an hour, and found Lady Sarah standing on the steps of the old house to welcome us. She was a tall and very stately woman, with black eyes and a swarthy complexion—a complexion unnaturally dark. Notwithstanding the grace of her appearance I noticed from the very first that there was something wild and uncanny about her. Her eyes were long and almond shaped. Their usual expression was somewhat languid, but they had a habit of lighting up suddenly at the smallest provo-

cation with a fierce and almost unholy fire. Her hair was abundant and white as snow, and her very black eyes, narrow-arched brows, and dark complexion were brought out into sharper contrast by this wealth of silvery hair.

She wore black velvet and some very fine Brussels lace, and as she came to meet me I saw the diamonds glittering on her fingers. Whatever her faults, few girls could desire a more picturesque mother-in-law.

Without uttering a word she held out both her hands and drew me into the great central hall. Then she turned me round and looked me all over in the fire-light.

"Fair and *petite*," she said. "Blue eyes, lips indifferent red, rest of the features ordinary. An English girl by descent, by education, by appearance. Look me full in the face, Flower!"

I did what I was bid. She gazed from her superior height into my eyes. As my eyes met



"I NOW SAW SOMETHING IN HIS APPEARANCE WHICH SURPRISED ME."

hers I was suddenly overpowered by the most extraordinary feeling which had ever visited me. All through my frame there ran a thrill of ghastly and overmastering fear. I shrank away from her, and I believe my face turned white. She drew me to her side again, stooped, and kissed me. Then she said, abruptly :—

"Don't be nervous"—and then she turned to her son.

"You have had a cold drive," she said.

"I hope you have not taken a chill?"

"Dear me, no, mother. Why should I?" he replied, somewhat testily. "Flower and I enjoyed our rush through the air."

He was rubbing his hands and warming himself by the log fire as he spoke—now he came to me and drew me towards its genial blaze. Lady Sarah glanced at us both. I saw her lips quiver and her black brows meet across her forehead. A very strange expression narrowed her eyes, a vindictive look, from which I turned away.

She swept, rather than walked, across the hall and rang a bell. A neatly dressed, pleasant-looking girl appeared.

"Take Miss Dalrymple to her room, Jessie, and attend on her," said Lady Sarah.

I was conducted up some low stairs and down a passage to a pretty, modern-looking room.

"Longmore is very old, miss," said Jessie, "and some of it is even tumbling to pieces, but Lady Sarah is never one for repairs. You won't find anything old, however, in this room, miss, for it has not been built more than ten years. You will have a lovely view of Salisbury Plain from here in the morning. I am glad, very glad, Miss Dalrymple, that you are not put into one of the rooms in the other wing."

I did not ask Jessie the meaning of her words. I thought she looked at me in an expressive way, but I would not meet her glance.

When I was ready Jessie conducted me to the drawing-room, where I found David standing on the rug in front of a log fire.

"Where is your mother?" I asked.

"She will be down presently. I say, what a pretty little girl it is," he cried, and he opened his big arms and folded me in a close embrace.

Just at that moment I heard the rustle of a silk dress, and, turning, saw Lady Sarah

She wore a rich ruby gown, which rustled and glistened every time she moved. I tore myself from David's arms and faced her. There was a flush on

my cheeks, and my eyes, I am sure, were suspiciously bright. She called me to her side and began to talk in a gentle and pleasant way.

Suddenly she broke off.

"Dinner is late," she said. "Ring the bell, David."

David's summons was answered by a black servant: a man with the most peculiar and, I must add, forbidding face I had ever seen.

"Is dinner served, Sambo?" inquired his mistress.

"It is on the table, missis," he replied, in excellent English.

Lady Sarah got up.

"David," she said, "will you take Flower to her place at the dinner-table?"

David led the way with me; Lady Sarah followed. David took the foot of the table, his mother the head. I sat at Lady Sarah's left hand.

During the meal which followed she seemed to forget all about me. She talked incessantly, on matters relating to the estate, to her son. I perceived that she was a first-rate business woman, and I noticed that David listened to her with respect and interest. Her eyes never raised themselves to meet his without a softened and extraordinary expression filling them. It was a look of devouring and overmastering love. His eyes, as he looked into hers, had very much the same expression. Even at me he had never looked quite like this. It was as if two kindred souls, absolutely kindred in all particulars, were holding converse one with the other, and as if I, David's affianced wife, only held the post of interloper.

Sambo, the black servant, stood behind Lady Sarah's chair. He made a striking figure. He was dressed in the long, soft, full trousers which Easterns wear. I learnt afterwards that Sambo was an aborigine from Australia, but Lady Sarah had a fancy to dress him as though he hailed from the Far East. The colour of his silken garments was a rich deep yellow. His short jacket was much embroidered in silver, and he had a yellow turban twisted round his swarthy head.

His waiting was the perfection of the art. He attended to your slightest wants, and never made any sound as he glided about the apartment. I did not like him, however; I felt nearly as uncomfortable in his presence as I did in that of Lady Sarah.

We lingered for some little time when the meal was over; then Lady Sarah rose.



"SAMBO, THE BLACK SERVANT, STOOD BEHIND LADY SARAH'S CHAIR."

"Come, Flower," she said.

She took my hand in one of hers.

"You will join us, David, when you have had your smoke," she continued, and she laid her shapely hand across her son's broad forehead.

He smiled at her.

"All right, madre," he said, "I shall not be long."

His black eyes fell from his mother's face to mine, and he smiled at me—a smile of such heart whole devotion that my momentary depression vanished.

Lady Sarah took me into the drawing room. There she made me seat myself in a low chair by her side, and began to talk.

"Has David never told you of my peculiar tastes, my peculiar recreations?"

"No," I replied; "all he has really told me about you, his mother, is that you love him with a very great love, and that he feared

our marriage would pain you."

"Tut!" she replied. "Do you imagine that a little creature like you can put a woman like me out? But we won't talk personal things to-night. I want you to see the great charm of my present life. You must know that I have for several years eschewed society. David has mingled with his kind, but I have stayed at home with my faithful servant Sambo and—my pets."

"Your pets!" I said; "dogs, horses?"

"Neither."

"Cats then, and perhaps birds?"

"I detest cats, and always poison any stray animals of that breed that come to Longmore. It is true I keep a few pigeons, but they are for a special use. I also keep rabbits for the same purpose."

"Then what kind of pets have you?" I asked.

"Reptiles," she said, shortly. "Would you like to see them?"

I longed to say to Lady Sarah that nothing would induce me to look at her horrible pets, but I was afraid. She gazed full at me, and I nodded my head. Her face was white, and her lips had taken on once more that hard, straight line which terrified me.

She rose from her seat, took my hand, and led me across the drawing room into the hall. We crossed the hall to the left. Here she opened a baize door and motioned to me to follow her. We went down some stairs—they were narrow and winding. At the bottom of the stairs was a door. Lady Sarah took a key from her pocket, fitted it into the lock, and opened the door.

A blast of wintry air blew on my face, and some scattered, newly-fallen snow wetted my feet.

"I forgot about the snow," she said. "The reptile house is only just across the

yard. It is warm there ; but if you are afraid of wetting your feet, say so."

"I am not afraid," I replied.

"That is good. Then come with me."

She held up her ruby-coloured silk dress, and I caught a glimpse of her neat ankles and shapely feet.

At the other side of the stone yard was a building standing by itself and completely surrounded with a high fence of closely meshed wire netting. Lady Sarah opened a door in the fence with another key, then she locked it carefully behind her. With a third key she unfastened the door of the building itself. When she opened this door the air from within, hot and moist, struck on my face.

She pushed me in before her, and I stood just within the entrance while she lit a lantern. As the candle caught the flame I uttered a sudden cry, for against my arm, with only the glass between, I saw a huge mottled snake, which, startled by the sudden light, was coiling to and fro. Its black forked tongue flickered about its lips as if it were angry at being disturbed in its slumbers.

I drew back from the glass quickly, and caught Lady Sarah's eyes fixed upon me with a strange smile.

"My pets are here," she said, "and this is one. I was a great traveller in my youth, as was my father before me. After my husband died I again went abroad. When David's education was finished he went with me. I inherit my father's taste for snakes and reptiles. I have lived for my pets for many

long years now, and I fancy I possess the most superb private collection in the kingdom. Look for yourself, Flower. 'This is the *Vipera Nasicornis*, or in our English language the African nose-horned snake. Pray notice his flat head. He is a fine specimen, just nine feet long. I caught him myself on the Gold Coast, with my friend Jane Ashley."

"Is he—venomous?" I asked. My lips trembled so that I could scarcely get out the words.

"Four hours for a man," was the laconic reply. "We count the degree of poison of a snake by the time a man lives after he is bitten. This fellow is, therefore, comparatively harmless. But see, here is the *Pseudechis Porphyriacus*—the black snake of Tasmania and Australia. His time is six minutes. Wake up, Darkey!" and she tapped the glass with her knuckles.

An enormous glistening coil, polished as ebony, moved, reared its head, and disappeared into the shadow of the wall.

I gave a visible shudder. Lady Sarah took no notice. She walked slowly between the cases, explaining various attributes and particulars

with regard to her favourites.

"Here are puff adders," she said ; "here are ring snakes ; in this cage are whip snakes. Ah ! here is the dreaded moccasin from Florida—here are black vipers from the South African mountains and copper-heads from the Peruvian swamps. I have a pet name for each," she continued ; "they are as my younger children."

As she said the words it flashed across my



"WAKE UP, DARKEY!"

mind, for the first time, that, perhaps, Lady Sarah was not in her right senses. The next instant her calm and dignified voice dispelled my suspicions.

"I have shown you my treasures," she said; "I hope you think it a great honour. My father, the late Lord Reighley, had a passion for reptiles almost equal to my own. The one thing I regret about David is that he has not inherited it."

"But are you not afraid to keep your collection here?" I asked. "Do you not dread some of them escaping?"

"I take precautions," she said, shortly; "and as to any personal fear, I do not know the meaning of the word. My favourites know me, and after their fashion they love me."

As she spoke she slid back one of the iron doors and, reaching in her hand, took out a huge snake and deliberately whipped the creature round her neck.

"This is my dear old carpet snake," she said; "quite harmless. You can come close to him and touch him, if you like."

"No, thank you," I replied.

She put the snake back again and locked the door.

We returned to the drawing-room. I went and stood by the fire. I was trembling all over, but not altogether from the coldness of the atmosphere.

"You are nervous," said Lady Sarah. "I thought you brave a few minutes ago. The sight of my beauties has shocked you. Will you oblige me by not telling David to night that I showed them to you?"

I bowed my head, and just at that moment David himself entered the room.

He went to the piano, and almost without prelude began to sing. He had a magnificent voice, like a great organ. Lady Sarah joined him. He and she sang together, the wildest, weirdest, most extraordinary songs I had ever listened to. They were mostly Spanish. Suddenly Lady Sarah took out her guitar and began to play David accompanying her on the piano.

The music lasted for about an hour. Then Lady Sarah shut the piano.

"The little white English girl is very tired," she said. "Flower, you must go to bed immediately. Good-night."

When I reached my room I found Jessie waiting to attend on me. She asked me at once if I had seen the reptiles.

"Yes," I said.

"And aren't you nearly dead with terror of them, miss?"

"I am a little afraid of them," I said. "Is there any fear of their escaping?"

"Law, no, miss! Who would stay in the house if there were? You need not be frightened. But this is a queer house, very queer, all the same."

The next day after breakfast David asked me if I had seen his mother's pets.

"I have," I replied, "but she asked me not to mention the fact to you last night. David, I am afraid of them. Must they stay here when I come to live at Longmore?"

"The madre goes, and her darlings with her," he answered, and he gave a sigh, and a shadow crossed his face.

"You are sorry to part with your mother?" I said.

"I shall miss her," he replied. "Even you, Flower, cannot take the place my mother occupies in my heart. But I shall see her daily, and you are worth sacrificing something for, my little white English blossom."

"Why do you speak of me as if I were so essentially English?" I said.

"You look the part. You are very much like a flower of the field. Your pretty name, and your pretty ways, and your fair complexion foster the idea. Mother admires you; she thinks you very sweet to look at. Now come into the morning room and talk to her."

That day, after lunch, it rained heavily. We were all in the morning-room, a somewhat dismal apartment, when David turned to his mother.

"By the way, madre," he said, "I want to have the jewels re-set for Flower."

"What do you say?" inquired his mother

"I mean to have the diamonds and the other jewels re-set for my wife," he replied, slowly.

"I don't think it matters," said Lady Sarah.

"Matters!" cried David; "I don't understand you. Flower must have the jewels made up to suit her *petite* appearance. I should like her to see them. Will you give me the key of the safe and I will bring them into this room?"

"You can show them, of course," said Lady Sarah. She spoke in a careless tone.

He looked at her, shrugged his shoulders, and I was surprised to see an angry light leap into his eyes. He took the key without a word and left the room.

I sat down on the nearest window-ledge - a small, slight, very fair girl. No one could feel more uncomfortable and out of place.

David returned with several morocco cases. He put them on the table, then he opened

them one by one. The treasures within were magnificent. There were necklets and bracelets and rings and tiaras innumerable. David fingered them, and Lady Sarah stood close by.

"This tiara is too heavy for you, Flower," said David, suddenly.

As he spoke, he picked up a magnificent circlet of flashing diamonds and laid them against my golden head. The next moment the ornament was rudely snatched away by Lady Sarah. She walked to a glass which stood between two windows and fitted the tiara over her own head.

"Too heavy for Flower, and it suits you, mother," said the young man, his eyes flashing with a sudden genuine admiration.

She laid the tiara on the table.

"Leave the things as they are for the present," she said. "It is not necessary to have them altered. You are marrying a flower, remember, and flowers of the field do not need this sort of adornment."

She tried to speak quietly, but her lips trembled and her words came in jerks.

"And I don't want to wear them," I cried "I don't like them."

"That is speaking in a very childish way," said Lady Sarah.

"You must wear them when you are presented, dear," remarked David. "But there is time enough; I will put the things away for the present."

The jewels were returned to the safe, and I breathed a sigh of relief.

That night I was tired out and slept well, and as the next morning was a glorious one, more like spring than mid-winter, David proposed that he and I should spend the day driving about Salisbury Plain and seeing the celebrated stones.

He went to the stables to order the dog



"HE LAID THEM AGAINST MY GOLDEN HEAD."

cart to be got ready, and I ran up to my room to put on my hat and warm jacket.

When I came back to the hall my future mother-in-law was standing there. Her face was calm and her expression mild and genial. She kissed me almost affectionately, and I went off with David in high spirits, my fears lulled to slumber.

He knew every inch of the famous Stonehenge, and told me many of the legends about its origin. There was one stone in particular which we spent some time in observing. It was inside the circle, a flat, broad stone, with a depression in the middle.

"This," said David, "is called the 'Slaughter Stone.' On this stone the Druids killed their victims."

"How interesting and how horrible!" I cried.



"THIS IS CALLED THE 'SLAUGHTER STONE'."

"It is true," he answered. "These stones, dating back into the ages of the past, have always had a queer fascination for me. I love them almost as much as my mother does. She often comes here when her nerves are not at their best and wanders about this magic circle for hours."

David told me many other legends. We lunched and had tea in the small town of Wilton, and did not return home until time for late dinner.

I went to my room, and saw nothing of Lady Sarah until I entered the drawing-room. I there found David and his mother in earnest conversation. His face looked full of annoyance.

"I am sorry," said Lady Sarah; "I am afraid, Flower, you will have to make up your mind to having a dull day alone with me to-morrow."

"But why dull?" interrupted David. "Flower will enjoy a day by herself with you, mother. She wants to know you, she wants to love you, as I trust you will soon love her."

Lady Sarah made no answer. After a pause, during which an expression of annoyance and displeasure visited her thin lips, she said:—

"An urgent telegram has arrived from our lawyers for David. He must go to town by the first train in the morning."

"I will come back to-morrow night, little girl," he said.

He patted me on my hand as he spoke, and I did not attempt to raise any objection. A moment later we went into the dining-room.

During the meal I was much disturbed by the persistent way in which Sambo watched me. Without exception, Sambo had the ugliest face I had ever seen. His eyes were far apart, and wildly staring out of his head. His features were twisted, he had

very thick lips, and the whole of the lower part of his face was in undue prominence. But, ugly as he was in feature, there was a certain dignity about him. His very upright carriage, his very graceful movements, his very picturesque dress, could not but impress me, although, perhaps, in a measure they added to the uneasiness with which I regarded him. I tried to avoid his gaze, but whenever I raised my eyes I encountered his, and, in consequence, I had very little appetite for dinner.

The evening passed quickly, and again that night I slept well. When I awoke it was broad daylight, and Jessie was pouring hot water into a bath for me.

"Mr. Ross went off more than two hours ago, miss," she said. "He left a message that I was to be very attentive to you, so if you want anything I hope you will ask me."

"Certainly I will," I replied.

Jessie was a pretty girl, with a rosy face and bright, pleasant eyes. I saw her fix these eyes now upon my face—she came close to me.

"I am very glad you are going to marry

Mr. Ross," she said, "and I am very glad that you will be mistress here, for if there was not to be a change soon, I could not stay."

"What do you mean?" I said.

She shrugged her shoulders significantly.

"This is a queer house," she said—"there are queer people in it, and there are queer things done in it, and *there are the reptiles!*"

I gave an involuntary shiver.

"There are the reptiles," she repeated.

"Lady Sarah and Sambo play tricks with them at times. Sambo has got a stuff that drives them nearly mad. When Lady Sarah is at her wildest he uses it. I have watched them when they didn't know I was looking: half a dozen of the snakes following Sambo as if they were demented, and Lady Sarah looking on and laughing! He puts the thing on his boots. I do not know what it is. They never hurt him. He flings the boots at them and they are quiet. Yes, it is a queer house, and I am afraid of the reptiles. By the way, miss, would you not like *me* to clean your boots for you?"

"Why so?" I asked. My face had turned white and my teeth were chattering. Her words unnerved me considerably.

"I will, if you like," she said. "Sambo shan't have them. Now, miss, I think you have everything you want."

She left me, and I dressed as quickly as I could. As I did so my eyes fell upon a little pair of brown boots, for which I had a special affection. They were polished up brightly; no boots could be more beautifully cleaned. What did Jessie mean? What did she mean, too, by speaking of Lady Sarah's wild fits?

I went downstairs, to find Lady Sarah in a genial humour. She was smiling and quite agreeable. Sambo did not wait at breakfast, and in consequence we had a pleasant meal. When it was over she took my hand and led me into her morning room.

"Come here," she said, "I want to speak to you. So you are David's choice! Now listen. The aim and object of my life ever since I lost my husband has been to keep David single."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"What I say. I love my son with a passion which you, you little white creature, cannot comprehend. I want him for myself *entirely*. You have dared to step in—you have dared to take him from me. But listen: even if you do marry him, you won't keep him long. You would like to know why—I will tell you. Because his love for you is only the passion which a man may experience

for a pair of blue eyes, and a white skin, and childish figure. It is as water unto wine compared to the love he feels for me. He will soon return to me. Be warned in time. Give him up."

"I cannot," I said.

"You won't be happy here. The life is not your life. The man is not the right sort of man for you. In some ways he is half a savage. He has been much in wild countries, in lands uninhabited by civilized people. He is not the man for you, nor am I the mother-in-law for you. Give him up. Here is paper and here is a pen. Write him a letter. Write it now, and the carriage shall be at the door and you will be taken to Wilton—from there you can get a train to London, and you will be safe, little girl, quite safe."

"You ask the impossible," I replied; "I love your son."

She had spoken with earnestness, the colour flaming into her cheeks, her eyes very bright. Now her face grew cold and almost leaden in hue.

"I have given you your choice and a way of escape," she said. "If you don't take the offer, it is not my fault." She walked out of the room.

What did she mean? I stayed where she had left me. I was trembling all over. Terrors of the most overmastering and unreasoning sort visited me. All I had lived through since I came to Longmore now flooded my imagination and made me weak with nervous fears. The reptile-house—Lady Sarah—Sambo's strange behaviour—Sambo's wicked glance—Jessie's words. Oh, why had I come? Why had David left me alone in this terrible place?

I got up, left the room, and strode into the grounds. The grounds were beautiful, but I could find no pleasure in them. Over and over the desire to run away visited me. I only restrained my nervous longing for David's sake. He would never forgive me if I left Longmore because I feared his mother.

The gong sounded for lunch, and I went into the house. Lady Sarah was seated at the table; Sambo was absent.

"I have had a busy morning," she said.

"Darkey is ill."

"Darkey!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, the black snake whose bite kills in six minutes. Sambo is with him; he and I have been giving him some medicine. I trust he will be better soon. He is my favourite reptile—a magnificent creature."

I made no remark.

"I am afraid you must amuse yourself as best you can this afternoon," she continued, "for Sambo and I will be engaged with the snake. I am sorry I cannot offer to send you for a drive, but two of the horses are out and the bay mare is lame."

I said I would amuse myself, and that I should not require the use of any of the horses, and she left me.

I did not trouble to go on the Plain. I resumed my restless wanderings about the place. I wondered, as I did so, if Longmore could ever be a real home to me. As the moments flew past I looked at my watch, counting the hours to David's return. When he was back, surely the intangible danger which I could not but feel surrounded me would be over.

At four o'clock Sambo brought tea for one into the drawing-room. He laid it down, with a peculiar expression.

"You will be sorry to hear, missie," he said, "that Missah Ross not coming back

to-night." The man spoke in a queer kind of broken English.

I sprang to my feet, my heart beating violently.

"Sorry, missie, business keep him—telegram to missis; not coming back till morning. Yah, missie, why you stay?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

The man had a hazel wand in his hand. I had noticed it without curiosity up to the present. Now he took it and pointed it at me. As he did so he uttered the curious word "*Ullinka*." The evil glitter in his eyes frightened me so much that I shrank up against the wall.

"What are you doing that for?" I cried. He snapped the stick in two and flung it behind him.

"Missie, you take Sambo's word and go right away to-night. Missis no well—Darkey no well—Sambo no well. No place for missie with blue eyes and fair hair. I say '*Ullinka*,' and '*Ullinka*' means *dead*—this fellah magic stick. Missie run to Wilton, take train from Wilton to London. Short track 'cross Plain—missie go quick. Old Sambo open wicket-gate and let her go. Missie go soon."

"Do you mean it?" I said.

"*Yeh*—yes."

"I wilt go," I said. "You terrify me. Can I have a carriage?"

"No time, missie. Old missis find out. Old missis no wish it—missie go quick 'cross Plain short track to Wilton. Moon come up short time."

"I will go," I whispered.

"Missie take tea first and then get ready," he continued. "Sambo wait till missie come down stairs."

I did not want the tea, but the man brought me a cup ready poured out.

"One cup strengthen missie, then short track 'cross Plain straight ahead to Wilton. Moon in sky. Missie safe then from old missis, from Darkey, and from Sambo."



"HE UTTERED THE CURIOUS WORD '*ULLINKA*.'"

I drank the tea, but did not touch the cake and bread and butter. I went to my room, fear at my heels. In my terror I forgot to remark, although I remembered it well afterwards, that for some extraordinary reason most of my boots and shoes had disappeared. My little favourite pair of brown boots alone was waiting for me. I put them on, buttoned them quickly, put on my fur coat and cap, and with my purse in my pocket ran downstairs. No matter what David thought of me now. There was something terrible in this house—an unknown and indescribable *fear*—I must get away from Longmore at any cost.

Sambo conducted me without a word down the garden and out on to the Plain through the wicket gate.

"Quick, missie," he said, and then he vanished from view, shutting and locking the gate behind him.

It was a perfect evening, still and cold. The sun was near the horizon and would soon set, and a full moon was just rising. I determined to walk briskly. I was strong and active, and the distance between Longmore and Wilton did not frighten me. I could cross the Plain direct from Longmore, and within two hours at longest would reach Wilton. My walk would lead past Stonehenge.

The Plain looked weird in the moonlight. It looked unfathomable: it seemed to stretch into space as if it knew no ending. Walking fast, running at intervals, pausing now and then to take breath, I continued my fearful journey.

Was Lady Sarah mad, was Sambo mad, and what ailed Darkey, the awful black snake whose bite caused death in six minutes? As the thought of Darkey came to me, making my heart throb until I thought it would stop, I felt a strange and unknown sensation of fatigue creeping over me: my feet began to lag. I could not account for this. I took out my watch and looked at it. I felt so tired that to go on without a short rest was impossible. There was a stone near. I sat on it for a moment or two. While resting I tried to collect my scattered thoughts. I wondered what sort of story I should tell David: how I would appease his anger and satisfy him that I did right in flying like a runaway from the home which was soon to be my own. As these thoughts came to me I closed my eyes; I felt my head nodding. Then all was lost in unconsciousness.

I awoke after what seemed a moment's sleep to find that I had been sitting on the stone for over half an hour. I felt refreshed

by my slumber, and started now to continue my walk rapidly. I went lightly over the springy turf. I knew my bearings well, for David had explained everything to me on our long expedition yesterday.

I must have gone over a mile right on to the bare Plain when I began once again to experience that queer and unaccountable sensation of weakness. My pace slowed down and I longed again to rest. I resolved to resist the sensation and continued my way, but more slowly now and with a heavily beating heart. My heart laboured in a most unnatural way. I could not account for my own sensations.

Suddenly I paused and looked back. I fancied that I heard a noise, very slight and faint and different from that which the wind made as it sighed over the vast, billowy undulations of the Plain. Now, as I looked back, I saw something about fifty yards away, something which moved swiftly over the short grass. Whatever the thing was, it came towards me, and as it came it glistened now and then in the moonlight. What could it be? I raised my hand to shade my eyes from the bright light of the moon. I wondered if I was the subject of an hallucination. But, no; whatever that was which was now approaching me, it was a reality, no dream. It was making straight in my direction. The next instant every fibre in my body was tingling with terror, for gliding towards me, in great curves, with head raised, was an enormous black snake!

For one moment I gazed, in sickened horror, and then I ran—ran as one runs in a nightmare, with thumping heart and clogged feet and knees that were turned to water. There could be no doubt of what had happened: the great black snake, Darkey, had escaped from Longmore and was following me. Why had it escaped? How had it escaped? Was its escape premeditated? Was it meant to follow me? Was I the victim of a pre-arranged and ghastly death? Was it—was it? my head reeled, my knees tottered. There was not a tree or a house in sight. The bare, open plain surrounded me for miles. As I reeled, however, to the crest of the rise I saw, lying in the moonlight, not a quarter of a mile away, the broken ring of Stonehenge. I reached it in time to clamber on to one of the stones. I might be saved. It was my only chance.

Summoning all my energies I made for the ruined temple. For the first hundred yards I felt that I was gaining on the brute, though I could hear, close on my track, its low,



continuous hiss. Then the deadly faintness for which I could not account once more seized me. I fancied I heard someone calling me in a dim voice, which sounded miles away.

Making a last frantic effort, I plunged into the circle of stones and madly clambered on to the great "Slaughter Stone." Once more there came a cry, a figure flashed past me, a loud report rang in my ears, and a great darkness came over me.

"Drink this, Flower."

I was lying on my back. Lady Sarah was bending over me. The moonlight was shining, and it dazzled my eyes when I first opened them. In the moonlight I could see that Lady Sarah's face was very white. There was a peculiar expression about it. She put her hand gently and deftly under my head, and held something to my lips. I drank a hot and fiery mixture, and was revived.

"Where am I—what has happened?" I asked.

"You are on the great 'Slaughter Stone' on

Salisbury Plain. You have had a narrow escape. Don't speak. I am going to take you home."

"Not back to Long more?"

"Yes, back to Long more, your future home. Don't be silly."

"But the snake, Darkey, the black snake?" I said. I cowered, and pressed my hand to my face. "He followed me, he followed me," I whispered.

"He is dead," she answered: "I shot him with my own hands. You have nothing to fear from me or from Darkey any more. Come!"

I was too weak to resist her. She did not look unkind. There was no madness in her eyes. At that moment Sambo appeared in view. Sambo lifted me from the stone and carried me to a dog-cart which stood on the Plain. Lady Sarah seated herself by my side, took the reins, and we drove swiftly away.

Once again we entered the house. Lady Sarah took me to the morning-room. She shut the door, but did not lock it. There was a basin of hot soup on the table.

"Drink, and be quick," she said, in an imperious voice.

I obeyed her; I was afraid to do otherwise.

"Better?" she asked.

"Yes," I replied, in a semi-whisper.

"Then listen."

I tried to rise, but she motioned me to stay seated.

"The peril is past," she said. "You have lived through it. You are a plucky girl, and I respect you. Now hear what I have to say."

I tried to do so and to keep down my trembling. She fixed her eyes on me and she spoke.

"Long ago I made a vow," she said. "I solemnly vowed before Almighty God that as long as I lived I would never allow my only

* I GAZED IN STICKENED
H FROTH.

son to marry. He knew that I had made this vow, and for a long time he respected it, but he met you and became engaged to you in defiance of his mother's vow and his mother's wish. When I heard the tidings I lost my senses. I became wild with jealousy, rage, and real madness. I would not write to you nor would I write to him."

"Why did you write at last—why did you ask me here?" I said then.

"Because the jealousy passed, as it always does, and for a time I was sane."

"Sane!" I cried.

"Yes, little girl; yes, *sane*! But listen. Some years ago, when on the coast of Guinea, I was the victim of a very severe sunstroke. From that time I have had fits of madness. Any shock, any excitement, brings them on.

"I had such a fit of madness when my son wrote to say that he was engaged to you. It passed, and I was myself again. You were not in the house an hour, however, before I felt it returning. There is only one person who can manage me at these times; there is only one person whom I fear and respect—my black servant Sambo. Sambo manages me, and yet at the same time I manage him. He loves me after his blind and heathen fashion. He has no fear, he has no conscience; to commit a crime is nothing to him. He loves me, and he passionately loves the reptiles. To please me and to carry out my wishes are the sole objects of his life.

"With madness in my veins I watched you and David during the last two days, and the wild desire to crush you to the very earth came over me. David went to London, and I thought the opportunity had come. I spoke to Sambo about it, and Sambo made a suggestion. I listened to him. My brain was on fire. I agreed to do what he suggested. My snake Darkey was to be the weapon to take your life. I felt neither remorse nor pity. Sambo is a black from Australia, an aborigine from that distant country. He knows the secrets of the blacks. There is a certain substance extracted from a herb which the blacks know, and which, when applied to any part of the dress or the person of an enemy, will induce each snake which comes across his path to turn and follow him. The substance drives the snake mad, and he will follow and kill his victim. Sambo possessed the stuff, and from time to time, to amuse me, he has tried its power on my reptiles. He has put it on his own boots, but he himself has never been bitten, for he has flung the boots

to the snakes at the last moment. This afternoon he put it on the brown boots which you are now wearing. He then terrified you, and induced you to run away across Salisbury Plain. He put something into your tea to deprive you of strength, and when you were absent about three-quarters of an hour he let Darkey loose. Darkey followed you as a needle will follow a magnet. Sambo called me to the wicket-gate and showed me the glistening creature gliding over the Plain in your direction. As I looked, a veil fell from my eyes. The madness left me, and I became sane. I saw the awful thing that I had done. I repented with agony. In a flash I ordered the dog-cart, and with Sambo by my side I followed you. I was just in time. I shot my favourite reptile. You were saved."

Lady Sarah wiped the drops of perspiration from her forehead.

"You are quite safe," she said, after a pause, "and I am sane. What I did, I did when I was not accountable. Are you going to tell David?"

"How can I keep it from him?"

"It seems hard to you now, but I ask you to do it. I promise not to oppose your marriage. I go meekly to the Dower House. I am tired of the reptiles—my favourite is dead, and the others are nothing to me. They shall be sent as a gift to the Zoological Gardens. Now will you tell David? If you do, I shall shoot myself to-night. Think for an hour, then tell me your decision." She left the room.

How I endured that hour I do not know! At the end of it I went to seek her. She was pacing up and down the great hall. I ran to her. I tried to take her hand, but she held her hands behind her.

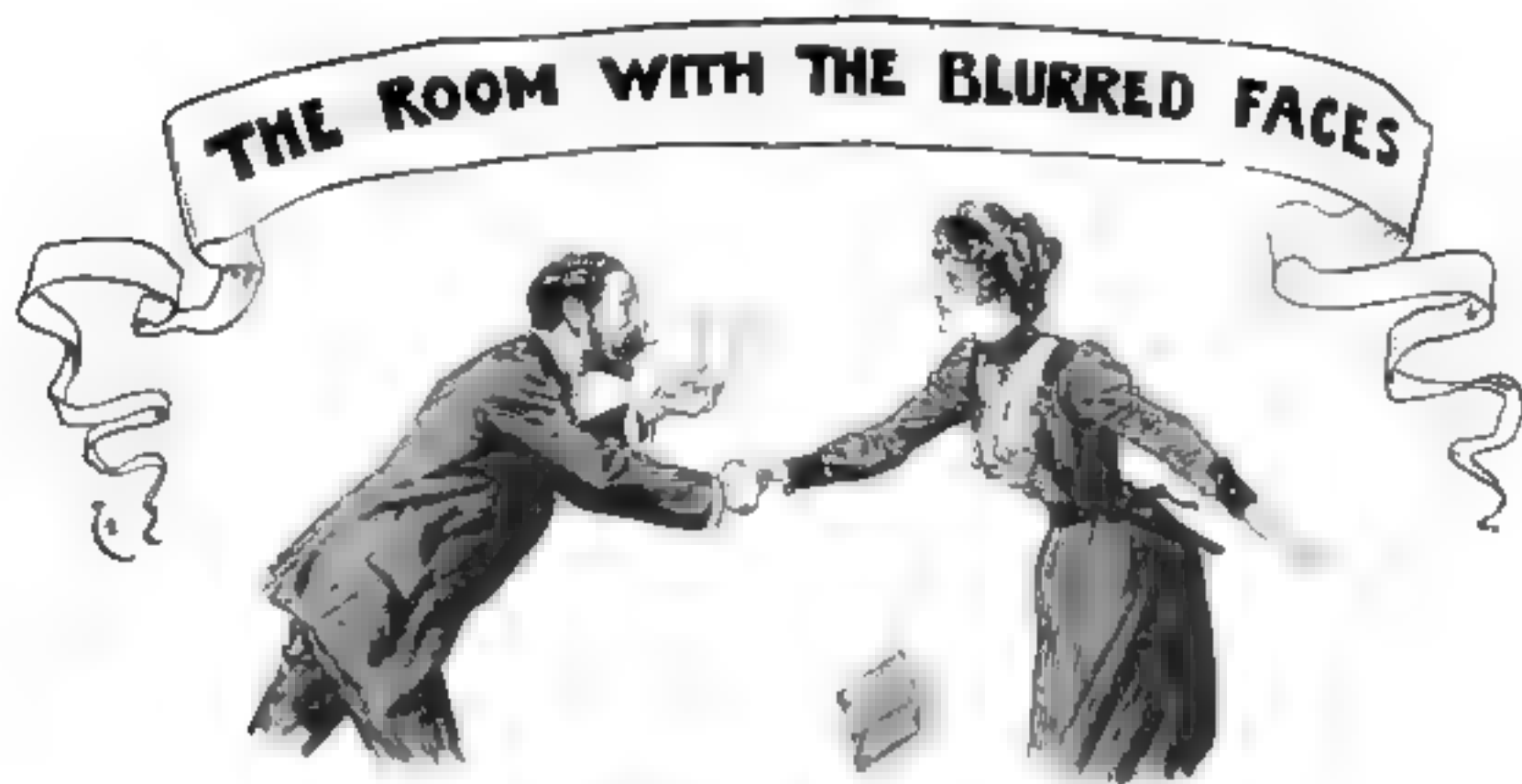
"He will love you, he will worship you, and I, his old mother, will be nothing to him. What are you going to do?" she said then.

"I will never tell him," I whispered.

She looked hard at me, and her great black eyes softened.

"You are worthy to be his wife," she said, in a hoarse voice, and she left me.

I am David's wife, and David does not know. He will never know. We are still on our honeymoon, but David is in trouble, for by the very last post news reached him of Lady Sarah's sudden death. He was absent from her when she breathed her last. He shall never know the worst. He shall always treasure her memory in his heart.



BY L. T. MEADE AND ROBERT EUSTACE.

MY husband and I had both spent our early years in Tasmania. I was nineteen when I married him—almost immediately afterwards he came into a fortune. A relative left him between £60,000 and £70,000. With this money we both resolved to gratify the darling wish of our hearts and to pay a visit to England. We had not quite decided whether we would settle there or not, but the idea of possessing a home of our own in the mother country was before us more or less during the voyage.

My husband's name was Frank Pelham, and Frank and I, as we sat side by side on the deck and watched the great ship ploughing through the waters, talked of England as home. My father and his father before him had lived in Tasmania; my mother was also a Colonist; but Frank had been to school in England, and nothing gave me greater pleasure than to hear him talk of the English and their ways.

When we reached London we went to a good hotel in the Strand, and from there we did the sights of the greatest city in the world. But as the time went on the desire to have a house of our own became more and more a wish of both our hearts.

"Why not spend part of your money in buying a good house in which we can live?"

I said on many occasions to Frank. "We need not stay all our time there, but I quite long to have an English home."

Frank shared my views, and before we had been three months in the old country he rushed into my presence one day, and told me in a tone of great excitement that he had found the very thing.

"The most lovely old place in Derbyshire, Alice," he cried. "Some hundreds of acres of land, splendidly-matured gardens, a great house in the Queen Anne style, pine woods, young plantations, trees hoary with age, and all the rest, and going for a song, Alice, my dear—going for a mere song!"

I sprang to my feet and said, joyfully, "Tell me all about it."

"Well, it is a piece of luck," continued Frank. "I was passing an agent's this morning, and remembered your great desire to possess an English country place. I entered the agent's and asked if there was anything on the market. He inquired what sort of place I wanted, and immediately said that if I did not mind a country house a little bit removed from the world, but in the most picturesque part of one of the loveliest counties in England, he thought he could accommodate me. He turned up the description and said he would give me an order to view."

"And are you going to see the place?" I asked.

"I wonder if it is necessary. His description is so vivid and the price so ridiculously cheap (only £5,000; really, Alice, my dear, a sum so small as scarcely to be worth considering), I am almost inclined to take it, so to speak, on spec."

"Yes," I answered; "it would be all the more fun; and if we don't like it," I continued, for I was sensible enough in my own way, "we can sell it again, can't we?"

"Yes," said Frank. "Well, Alice, I will go round to the agent again after lunch."

"And I will come with you," I answered.

We were both so excited we could scarcely partake of our midday meal, and soon afterwards we found ourselves in the spacious offices of Messrs. Hampton and Rush, in Jermyn Street.

A young man of gentlemanly appearance furnished me with a chair, and soon Frank and I were eagerly asking questions about the place at our disposal.

It went by the name of Lauristown, and was about five miles away from the nearest railway station. There were, I forget how many bedrooms, sitting rooms innumerable, greenhouses, vineries, a large billiard-room, and every conceivable comfort.

"But you must not imagine," said the young man whom we were interviewing, "that the house is modern; on the contrary, it is old—in some parts very old."

"I shall like it all the better for that," I answered.

He looked full at me—he was a pleasant-faced young man with blue eyes. I noticed how they lingered on my face as though he were sorry for me. I almost resented their expression, and, turning to Frank, said:—

"If we can really secure this place as our very own we cannot do better than purchase."

"You will surely go to see it, madam?" said Mr. Hampton.

"My wife thinks that is scarcely necessary," said Frank. "But perhaps, dear," he added, "I had better run down and have a look round."

"Just as you please," I replied; "only I would much rather you didn't. I suppose," I continued, turning to Mr. Hampton, "if we don't like the place we can easily sell it again?"

His answer was somewhat dubious; he did not know—he thought we ought to see the place before we bought it. Both Frank and he soon became immersed in the business part of the transaction, and I moved restlessly about the room. I could scarcely believe in my good fortune—an English home

of my own! How delightful! How proud I should be to welcome my Tasmanian cousins to partake of hospitality in my English castle!

From that moment Frank and I could only talk of Lauristown. We paid many visits to the agent. We pushed the business forward with all imaginable dispatch, and I, with all my might and main, did my very best to prevent Frank from going to see the place. In the end, however, he overruled my objections.

I was fast asleep one morning when he startled me with giving me a slight kiss on my forehead.

"I am off to Lauristown," he said, "just to have a look round. It is better, I am sure, that I should see the place before we quite conclude. I shall be back again in the morning."

Before I had time to be angry with him he was gone.

I spent the day peeping into various furniture shops, and thinking of the exquisite pleasure which lay before me in the furnishing of my country house. Frank came back the next morning in high spirits.

"I tell you what, Alice," he cried, "Lauristown is worth treble what we are giving for it. How the proprietors can think of selling such a splendid place for so low a figure beats my calculations. But I have one piece of news for you, little woman, and I don't know whether you will appreciate it."

"What is that?" I asked.

"The late owner went out of his mind there."

"Well, and what of that?" I asked. "Of course, I am sorry for him; but, provided he is no longer at Lauristown, that can scarcely affect me."

"I have just mentioned it to you. He is confined in an asylum in the same county, and his representatives are selling the place in his name. I am told further that it has been on the market for some little time."

"Tell me about the house," I cried. "Describe every room."

Frank did so in the imperfect manner in which a man would convey such information. The house itself evidently meant very little to him. It was the gardens, the glass-houses, and the splendid reach of moor and river and wood which fascinated him.

"I shall have excellent shooting," he cried, "and fishing to any extent. It certainly is a place in a thousand."

A few days afterwards Lauristown was

ours. Frank showed me the title-deeds, and now there was nothing to prevent our taking possession of our property.

"This is delicious," I said; "we will go to-morrow."

"The local agent, Mr. Markham, will bring a landau to meet us any day we like to go," replied my husband. "The house is practically unfurnished, but the bailiff's wife says she can collect enough furniture to put into one bedroom, and she herself will provide our meals at the cottage."

"Then wire to that dear, good-natured woman and tell her to have everything ready for us to-morrow," was my quick answer.

Accordingly the next morning we left London for Derbyshire. We arrived at a small station called Woolstack early on a beautiful afternoon. The time was early June, and the air was warm and balmy with the first heat of summer.

Markham, the agent, met us at the railway station. He had brought a tumble-down old landau for our use. We had a lovely drive up hill and down dale, and we enjoyed many peeps of lofty hills and valleys richly wooded.

At last we found ourselves in a lower valley than any we had yet entered; soon we passed through gates of wrought iron and drove up an avenue overshadowed by trees.

"How lovely this all is!" I could not help crying. "Have we many neighbours, Mr. Markham?"

"No one lives very close to Lauristown, madam," was his reply.

"I am all the better pleased," I answered. "In Tasmania we are accustomed to visiting our friends at almost any distance, and the best fun of all is to ask people to stay with us."

"I doubt, madam," said Markham, "if"—and then he paused, looked confused, and dropped into silence.

I wondered why he left off speaking so suddenly. I examined his face with some curiosity.

He had sunken grey eyes, an incisive manner, and a very nervous mouth.

"Lauristown has been on the market for two or three years," he said, after a pause. "I hope you may like it, Mrs. Pelham. It has gone rather cheap, hasn't it?"

"We have got the place for £5,000," said Frank.

"Quite enough," was Markham's answer.

Just then we left the shelter of the trees and drove rapidly round a wide gravel sweep which led to the porch of a beautiful old house.

The house and the grounds immediately near were as romantic and picturesque as the heart of man could wish. The house itself was very large and rambling. It had evidently been added to from time to time, for gables had sprung up here and small turrets there, and wings jutted out to right and left, and curious additions were visible both at back and front. The walls were almost completely covered with a thick mantle of ivy, wistaria, and Virginia creeper, and the house itself was partly shaded by heavy oak trees. There was a smooth, rolling lawn just before the front entrance, which was now brilliantly green and gay with flower-beds. The sun was shining brightly, and my heart danced within me as I stepped out of the old landau.

Markham accompanied Frank and me all over the house. My husband was in just as good spirits as I was myself.

"When the place is furnished," he said, "it will be something to be proud of."

Presently we entered a large bedroom over the entrance, and in full view of the lovely, flower-decked lawn. Some old-fashioned furniture had been put into this room. There was a somewhat tattered carpet on the floor, and a big, gloomy-looking four-poster occupied the place of honour against the principal wall.

"This is the very best we can do for you, sir," said Markham. "The bailiff's wife is prepared to supply all your meals while you remain, but there is no bedroom at the lodge fit for you to sleep in."

"No need for you to apologize for this room," said Frank. "It will do nicely, won't it, Alice?"

"Yes," I answered. "Nothing could please me better."

As I spoke I ran across the oak floor and looked out of one of the windows. A magnificent English view met my gaze, the sort of view which no Tasmanian girl could look at unmoved. The thick woods in their first summer green, the rich and lovely valleys, the lofty peaks of the Derbyshire hills, all raised my spirits to a pitch of enthusiasm.

"I am so happy!" I whispered to Frank.

Markham, still with that curious, dissatisfied, almost frightened look on his face, waited at the door while we examined our apartment—he then accompanied us on a tour of inspection round the rest of the house.

By-and-by we found ourselves in the west wing, and here I noticed a certain peculiarity with regard to some of the rooms. There

were three rooms in this part of the house supported by pillars. A pillar ran up the centre of each room—surely a very obsolete method of supporting the ceiling.

"This must be the oldest part of the house?" I said, turning to the agent.

"It is, madam," he answered.

"How strange to have these pillars here!" was my next remark.

Markham was silent.

Half an hour later we started for the bailiff's cottage. We had not gone far before we heard the quick sound of a horse's hoofs behind us, and immediately afterwards a man galloped up. He pulled in his reins and shouted to Frank.

was a typical English country gentleman, with a hearty manner, a pronounced, ringing voice, and keen eyes.

"Is it possible," he said, glancing from my husband to me, "that you both mean to live in Derbyshire? I thought, my dear Pelham, that you were a Tasmanian to your backbone."

"England has been the home of my ancestors," was Frank's reply. "Alice and I are passionately attached to England, and, in short, we have bought this place."

"You have bought—*Lauristown*!" cried Mr. Bamfyeld. He stepped a foot away, looked us both all over, and then said, slowly: "I cannot say that I congratulate you.

I would not live in that house for all the gold of Golconda."

"What do you mean?" asked Frank.

"I will tell you if you really wish to hear. Perhaps I am still in time—perhaps you have not yet completed the purchase."

"Of course you must explain your mysterious words, Bamfyeld," said Frank. "It would take a good bit to frighten either my wife or myself. Will you come with us now and have tea? We are going to Dawson's cottage; it



"A MAN GALLOPED UP."

"By all that is wonderful, Pelham, where have you dropped from? What in the name of fortune has brought you here?"

Frank's face beamed all over with delight. He held out his hand.

"Do you live in this part of the world, Bamfyeld?" he asked.

"Yes; my place is just over those hills. It is five years since we last met at Oxford! And how are you? You look well."

"I am as fit as man can be," was Frank's reply. "May I introduce my wife?"

The man whom my husband called Bamfyeld had alighted from his horse. He was about Frank's own age, and in appearance

is there, just through the wood."

"I will come with you," said Bamfyeld.

He turned as he spoke and walked with us. His manner was very grave, and for some extraordinary reason he seemed depressed. The agent also looked uncomfortable and ill at ease.

As soon as we got to the cottage Mrs. Dawson received us with words of hearty welcome, took us into her neat little parlour, and provided us with an excellent meal.

As soon as it was over I asked Mr. Bamfyeld what his curious words meant.

"Do you really wish me to say?" he asked.

"Undoubtedly," I replied.

"Yes, tell us everything," said Frank.

"Well," he answered, "the long and short of it is this: Lauristown is haunted!"

"Oh! is that all?" said Frank. "I think Alice and I can live down any number of ghosts. What haunts the place, Bamfyeld?" he continued.

Mr. Bamfyeld leant across the table. He spoke slowly and quietly.

"I am sorry you have bought the place," he said. "I don't believe I am wanting in pluck, but I would not live there myself on any consideration whatsoever."

"But do explain. What is supposed to be seen at Lauristown?" I queried, impatiently.

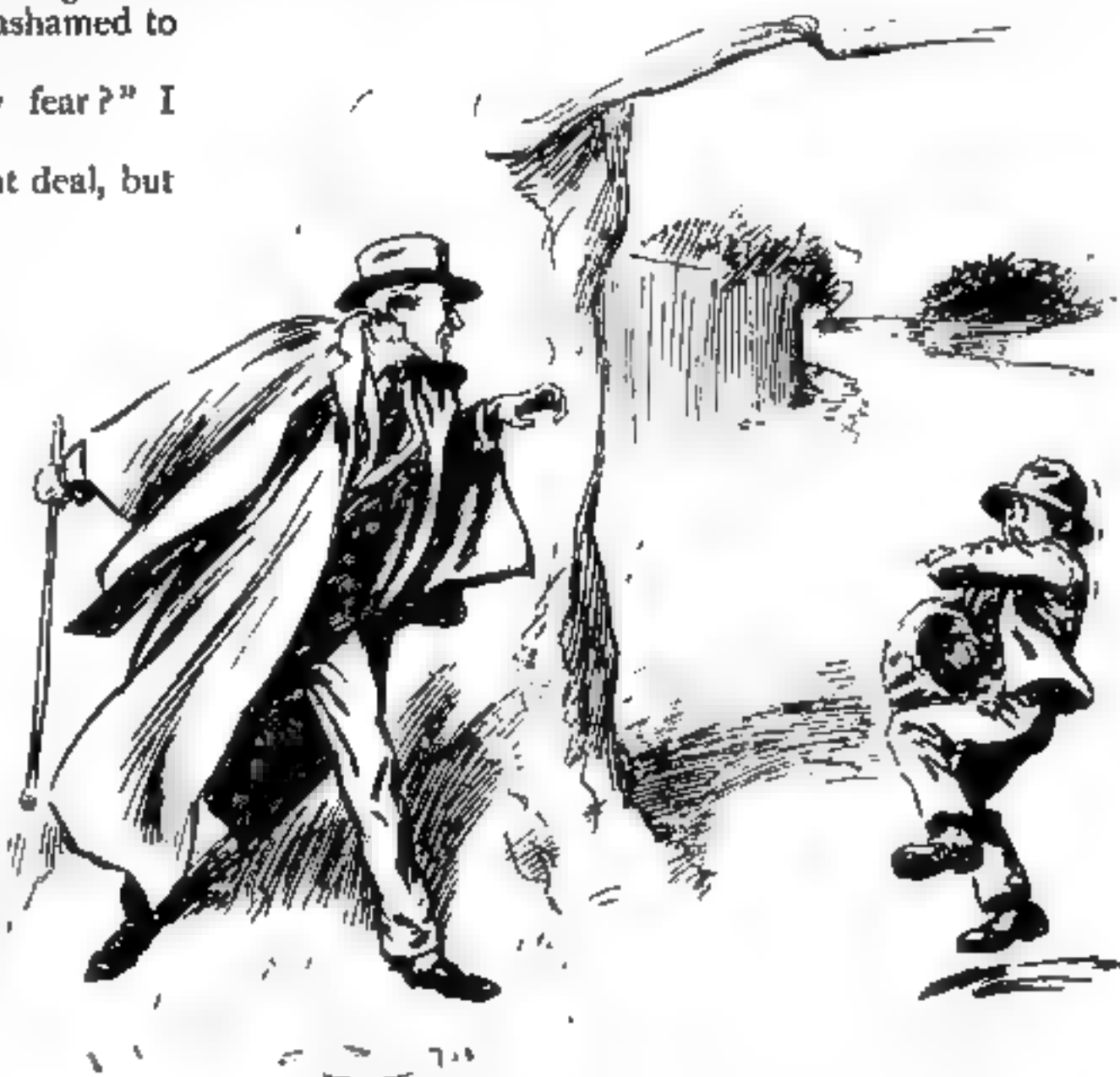
Bamfyeld looked fixedly at me, and dropped his voice.

"That I don't know," he said; "but I can tell you this, there is a mystery about the place of the most horrible and appalling kind. Country people are, of course, proverbially superstitious; but you will realize that the thing that haunts Lauristown is something more than old women's talk when I inform you that not a man in the neighbourhood would spend a night in that house for £50. I have spoken many a time to the labourers and villagers, and they all say the same thing. The impression of fear with regard to the house is so general that they are not a bit ashamed to confess it."

"But what do they fear?" I asked.

"I don't know a great deal, but I will tell you, Mrs Pelham, what I do know. There is reported to be in that house a room which is called 'The Room with the Blurred Faces,' and there is as weird a legend attached to that room as you have ever listened to. About twenty years ago some remarkable occurrences took place either in the house or in the neighbourhood. The late owner—the man from whom you have bought the place—was

then living there. He was unmarried and was accounted eccentric, but no one for a moment supposed that his reason was tottering. He seldom had visitors, and his servants, as a rule, left after a very short period of service. He was the last heir to the property, which had come to him through a long line of ancestors. He lived in one or two rooms in the west wing of the house, and never cared to inhabit the spacious bedrooms and reception-rooms in the body of the mansion. About twenty years ago he advertised for a secretary, and a young man offered for the post. Mr. Laurie was a learned man, and had at that time a fine library of books. What he wanted with a secretary no one quite knew, but it is certain that after two or three months the unfortunate man disappeared. He was searched for high and low; he was advertised for, the police and the best detectives were put on his track, but from that day to this nothing whatever has been discovered about him. Mr. Laurie's story was that he left his house late one evening and never returned. There was no evidence against Laurie, but the servants who were then in the house immediately left, although they confessed that they had no reason for doing so except pure fright. It was with some difficulty that Laurie got other



"HE TOOK TO FRIGHTENING THE CHILDREN."

servants to share his solitude, and a year or two later his valet disappeared in the same unaccountable manner. Suspicion was very strong against Laurie, but again there was not the slightest evidence which could lead to his being arrested on a charge of murder; but after that no servant would stay with him. He was a tall man, of great physical strength. The immediate neighbours dreaded to be seen in his presence, and after a time he took to frightening the children, and altogether making himself so alarming that it was found necessary to confine him in a lunatic asylum. He has been in an asylum, about ten miles from here, for the last five or six years. The doctors say his case is absolutely hopeless, and the Commissioners in Lunacy decided to sell the place in order to provide for his maintenance. He had evidently squandered all his available means, but how his money went or any particulars about it were never forthcoming. The place was put up to auction, but so widespread was the feeling of horror with regard to it, that there was not a single bid for the property. My dear Pelham, how much, may I ask, did you give for Lauristown?"

"Five thousand pounds," said my husband.

"Enough, and more than enough," was his reply.

"Well, we have bought it now," said Frank, "and, uncomfortable as your story is, I cannot see how it at all affects us. If the madman had anything to do with the disappearances you speak of, he is out of the way of doing further mischief."

"And the ghost—you have not alluded to the ghost yet," I continued.

"I am coming to the mysterious part, Mrs. Pelham. Soon after the disappearance of the unfortunate valet there was observed on several occasions the outlines of two hideous faces with grotesque and distorted features on the ceiling of a certain room in the house. The servants saw them first, and in the greatest terror went to acquaint the police. A detective was introduced into the house and taken by the servants through every room, but the faces were nowhere to be seen. They had disappeared as absolutely as they had come."

"A figment of the imagination," said Frank, with a laugh; "if those are your ghosts, Bamfylde, I don't think you can alarm us."

"I have no object in frightening you," he answered, "and I shall be more than thankful if you succeed in disabusing the people

round here of the horror which they feel with regard to the old house. Suppose we go back there now and examine it carefully from end to end."

"Nothing would please me better," replied Frank.

We left the cottage and, accompanied by Mr. Bamfylde, returned to the mansion.

"We will make a systematic search," he said. "We will go through each room on the ground floor, then go upstairs and do the same."

There was still plenty of light, and we started on our pilgrimage. We examined each room with extreme care. As the house was large this took some little time. Everywhere we were met with emptiness and desolation—the books had long ago been removed from the old library; the furniture had been sold to provide sufficient means for the miserable tenant of the asylum not far away. Our footsteps echoed through the corridors and our voices rang loud and harsh through the bare rooms. Each ceiling of every room did we stare at, and no sign of the faces could we discover.

"It is their fashion to *come and go*," said Bamfylde. "I trust you may never see them."

"They don't exist," I said, with a laugh, and soon afterwards my husband's friend took his departure.

"Well, Alice," said Frank, "what do you think of Bamfylde's tale?"

"I am not frightened at all," I replied. "I don't believe for a single moment that there is a ghost in this dear old house, and I cannot help feeling surprised that a sensible-looking man like Mr. Bamfylde should be so much impressed by the superstitious talk of the country-side."

"What a good thing it is that you are a Tasmanian," said my husband. "Girls from Tasmania are celebrated for their strong nerves."

He laughed and kissed me, and we spent a very pleasant evening together.

I never slept sounder than I did that night, and the next day Frank and I occupied ourselves in going round the grounds. We were in the beautiful rose-garden when we saw a boy in a telegraph messenger's uniform crossing the lawn. He gave my husband a telegram. Frank tore it open and uttered a cry of annoyance.

"This is from my lawyer," he said. "He wishes to see me on a matter of immediate importance, and asks me to come to town to-day. Some stupid investment, of course. Shall I go, Alice?"

"Mr. Bruton would not have telegraphed if it was not urgent," I answered. "Of course you will go, Frank; I don't at all mind being left."

"Would you not rather come with me?"

"No," I replied; "I am interested in the place, and it is not worth while going to town for one night."

"But remember Mr. Bamfylde's gloomy tale. Can you sleep alone at Lauristown?"

"I can, and soundly," I said, with a light laugh, for there in the rose-garden, with the sunshine falling all over me, how could I fear the idle tale which I had listened to on the previous night?

Frank therefore replied to the telegram in the affirmative, and about an hour later I accompanied him to the railway station. He said that he would come back by a night train, and would probably arrive at Lauristown before six in the morning.

"Leave the side-door on the latch, Alice," he said, "and I will slip in without disturbing you."

I promised to do so, and returned in high spirits to continue my investigation of our charming property.

The rest of the day passed quickly. I had my meals at the bailiff's cottage, and arrived there between eight and nine o'clock to partake of a comfortable supper. As I went into the little parlour I observed that the bailiff watched me with a rather peculiar expression. He was a stoutly-built man with kindly eyes. I watched him go into the kitchen and say something to his wife. A moment later she came into the parlour, her whole manner expressing distress.

"Dawson bid me say, ma'am, that, seeing you are alone to night, I could make you up a comfortable bed on the sofa here, if so be you would honour me?"

"She thinks I am frightened," I said to myself. I almost laughed.

"But I shall not be lonely," was my answer. "I have before now slept in a house by myself, and I think I should prefer to occupy the room you were kind enough to get ready for me last night. Thank you all the same," I added.

Her face turned quite white.

"Then, ma'am, I hope you won't think I am taking a liberty, but would you like me to come and sleep in the room with you?"

Poor woman! I saw how she suffered when she made this request. Nor for worlds would I put her to the torture. I laid my hand on her arm.

"Thank you heartily," I said, "but I assure you it is not the least necessary."

She breathed a sigh of undoubted relief.

"Thank you for my good supper," I said; "I will go back to the house now."

"Dawson!" she called to her good man, "will you see the young lady back to Lauristown?"

I had lingered over my supper, and it was now past ten o'clock. Dawson appeared. He preceded me across the flower-garden, and we entered the house by the side-door.

"I want this door to be left on the latch," I said, suddenly, "for my husband will be returning early in the morning."

"But do you really wish it, ma'am?"

"Yes," I said; "you can go out again by this door. Just close it—do not lock it."

He accompanied me upstairs, and, going to my little paraffin lamp, struck a match and lit it. He then glanced round the room. His manner was quite as nervous as his wife's had been.

"There is a room quite handy near by," he said; "may be you would like me, ma'am, to stay in it for the night?"

"No, thank you," I answered. "You and your wife are most kind, but I assure you I am not the least frightened. As I said to her, I have often spent the night alone in a house."

"Ah!" he replied, in a low voice, "but there are houses *and* houses. At least, ma'am, you will lock the door of your bedroom?"

I promised to do this and he left me. I heard him go downstairs, and I heard the echo of the side-door being closed behind him. That door was in the west wing of the house, some distance from my bedroom. But in the emptiness of the house and the stillness of the night the slight sound it made as Dawson closed it distinctly reached my ears.

I was now absolutely alone in a house nearly half a mile from any other habitation—a large, rambling, empty house that not one of the neighbours would sleep in for £50.

"All fancy!" I whispered to myself. "It is quite possible that when that dreadful Mr. Laurie lived here he frightened people, but he is not here now. As to those faces! But they never existed; of that I am positive."

I sat down in a little chair near the open window. I was determined not to be at all afraid. But with all my determination a strange sense of loneliness began to creep over me. My heart beat. I could hear it thumping against my side. I jumped up and began to examine the large, bare room. I determined to make it as bright as possible,

so I turned up the wick of the little lamp and lit several candles, and then I went and stood by the open window. This window opened on to a balcony. I went out and stood on the balcony. The moon was now rising high in the heavens, and great patches of whiteness lay across the flower-garden, making the rest of the lawn look black by contrast. As I stood and looked across the lawn I suddenly saw, or fancied I saw, a slight movement—a shadow that seemed to stir. I watched it intently for a minute.



"I FANCIED I SAW A SLIGHT MOVEMENT."

"This won't do," I said to myself. "The wind is moving the branches of the trees—a branch moved and its shadow flickered."

But as this thought came to me I remembered that the night was still with a solemn stillness, for there was no wind.

I retired back into the room, and suddenly putting out the lights, went to another window, and stared out into the night. Beyond doubt, there was something or someone on the lawn. The shadow moved once more unmistakably. It not only moved, but I saw it move in a direction nearer to the house. My heart beat harder than ever, and just then a

terrible memory came to me. The side-door in the west wing was on the latch. Suffer what horrors I might, I must go down immediately and lock it. I knew if I hesitated my nerves would be paralyzed by fear. I determined to go before terror could overmaster me. Lighting a candle and arming myself with a heavy oak stick, which Frank had bought from a villager the day before, I started on my journey through the empty house. In spite of every effort fear overmastered me.

I was not at all afraid of the house now, or anything it could contain—but only of that moving shadow on the moonlit lawn! Should I, could I, oh, could I, get to the side-door in time to lock it? The shadow had been within 50 ft. of the house when I last saw it. It was a long and rambling way to the west wing. I had not yet taken off my out-door boots and my footsteps echoed as I ran. I shielded the candle with one hand in order to keep it from going out. At last I reached the west wing. Here the rooms opened one into the other. I ran through them quickly. Frightened as I was, I was yet sufficiently calm to notice a change in their appearance. Yesterday, when I had seen them there had been *three* rooms with pillars in them. Now there were only *two*. Beyond the third room was a small corridor which led down some steps to the side-door, which was on the latch in order to facilitate Frank's return to the house. There was no pillar

in this third room. What had become of it? I rushed through the room. It was a small apartment, about 12 ft. square. I ran down the steps. I had all but reached the door when I started back.

How I suppressed the cry which rose to my lips I can never tell. For against the door, which was shut, stood a man. He was tall, dressed as a gentleman, with calm, serene features and a lofty forehead. His thin, white hair was brushed away from his narrow temples. He stood quietly in the doorway and viewed me as I came to meet him with a slow smile.

"Ah!" he said, "and what are you doing here?"

I made a tremendous effort and found my voice.

"Will you go away?" I said. "This house belongs to me. Open the door and go out."

The very imminence of the peril gave me courage. When I found my voice I felt my nerves become tense and strong as iron. The man smiled again, this time more broadly.

"I prefer to remain," he said. "May I repeat my question? What are you doing here?"

"Go!" I said, and I pointed to the door.

"I prefer to stay."

"Then kindly move from the door and let me go out," I said.

Once more he smiled, revealing a row of perfect teeth.

"What are you doing here?" he said.

"This house belongs to my husband," I answered. "You have no right to be in it—go away."

Again that curious and, I could not help perceiving, most evil smile crossed his face. He advanced slowly to meet me. He came up one or two stairs. Before I could prevent him he had clutched me by the wrist.

"Has your husband bought this place?" he asked, and he peered into my face.

All of a sudden I guessed who he was. The madman—Mr. Laurie!

"God in Heaven help me!" I cried, passionately, under my breath. "For Frank's sake, for all I hold dear in the world, keep me calm."

The man was mad—my one chance was to humour him.

"This is my house," he said, in a gentle voice. "It is remarkable to see you here; and did I hear aright when you said that the house belongs to another? Clearly understand that I don't permit that. Those who try to wrest my property from me suffer. But, come, we will go through the old house together. I have not seen it for some time. We will go through it in the dead of night together."

As he spoke he pushed me before him up the stairs. We reached the little corridor which led to the room which had contained a central pillar and was now without it. The next moment we had entered

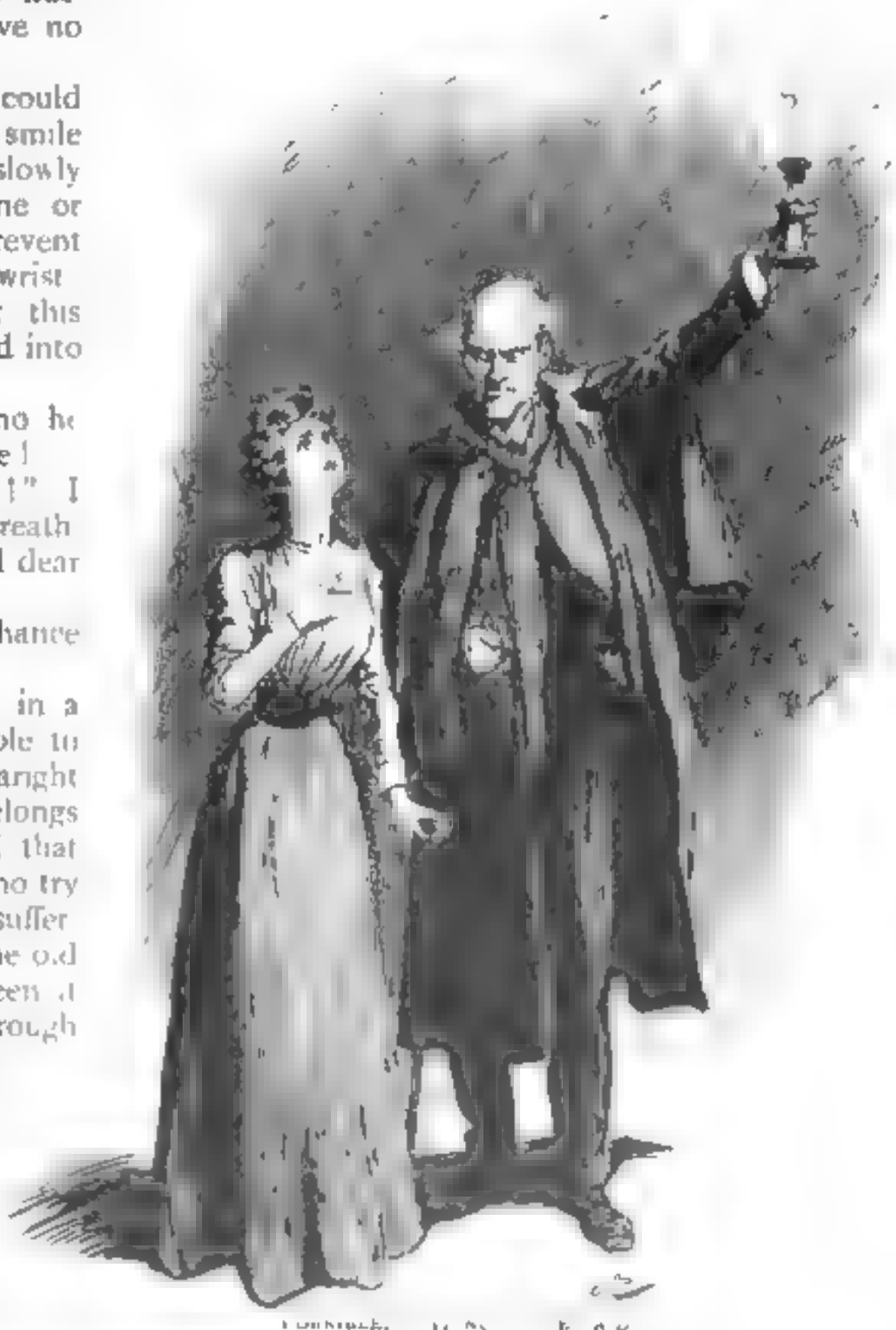
and were standing side by side where the pillar had been. He snatched my candle from me and held it aloft.

"Look up," he said.

I raised my eyes. On the ceiling, which I saw was formed of rough cement, were two stains, each representing a human face. The faces were horribly distorted, with wide, grinning mouths and blurred features. A faint cry burst from my lips. I started back in terror.

"Horrible, is it not?" he said. "They came here—here where we are standing; those who once owned faces as charming as yours. They were good and gentle as you are good and gentle, but I read malice in their eyes. The desire to possess what could never be theirs. Stand still a moment let me look into *your* eyes. Do you also pine for possession?"

"Only to go," I cried. "Only to go away."



For God's sake, let me go. Let me go, sir. You can have the house and everything, only let me go."

I fell on my knees—I raised my hands in agony.

He looked at me and smiled again.

"I have come just in time," he said. "But you would like to examine the faces. They *come and go*, you know. Sometimes they are invisible. When not to be seen there is nothing to be apprehended. When you see them as they grin at you now there is danger close at hand. Do you know why they smile like that?" He stooped. "Because they pine for a fresh victim. How would a third face on that ceiling look? Ha! ha!"

He laughed loudly; then he drew himself up and spoke soberly once more.

"You wonder how the faces came. There was a stain—caused?—ah! you will soon know how it was caused. In order duly to impress on my own brain what took place, in order thoroughly and once for all to assure myself that those who longed to possess could never possess, I painted with red ochre those stains into the semblance of faces, faces blurred—faces destroyed. Excuse me one moment; I will leave you and return."

Before I knew what he was doing he had rushed to the door; it banged heavily behind him. He had taken the candle with him. But for the moon which was shining in through a narrow window I was in the dark. At first my feeling was one of intense thankfulness. I rushed wildly to the door and tried to open it. While he was gone I might escape through the side-entrance and hide in the shrubbery; but just before I reached the door I heard a strange noise which turned me rigid. I listened. From somewhere came the distinct sound of something moving below. The next instant I felt a strange swaying of the floor beneath my feet. I now seized the little flat handle of the door and wrenched it towards me. I tore at it madly. It was not locked, but something was holding it back. Glancing down I saw in the moonlight the cause. The floor of the room had risen and so had fixed the door tight into its frame. Not only had it risen, but it was steadily and slowly rising. A blind panic seized me, and I rushed round the room searching for some mode of exit. There was none, only a small slit of a window in the solid brick. With my oak stick I smashed the glass of the window and let in some air, but it was impossible that I could escape by it, for it would hardly admit both my hands.

I stood by it for a moment or two, however, uttering cry after cry. All in vain, as I knew but too well. The nearest house was Dawson's cottage, and that was half a mile away. The moon sank lower in the heavens, and now a direct beam lit my horrible prison-chamber. I glanced once more at the grinning faces above me, and then, indeed, my terror reached its ultimate note. Those were impressions made by the terrible madman of the faces of his former victims who had been crushed against the ceiling in this devilish engine. A faint, sick feeling came over me, and I crouched on the floor. My capacity for thought was numbed. I could do nothing but watch the shortening walls as the floor itself crept steadily higher and higher, going up scarcely two inches to the minute, but ascending with an even and undeviating precision. I knew that there were only a few minutes between me and an awful death. I forced myself to think quietly, and by a superhuman effort I partly succeeded.

What chance had I of escape? Were I able to leave the room, the madman was waiting for me outside. But I could not leave this chamber of horror. Suggestion after suggestion of possible escape rushed through my brain, each to be abandoned as soon as conceived. I could not cut through the upper part of the door, nor could I dislodge the bricks by the window. The room itself was bare; there was nothing to interpose between the ceiling and floor to keep them apart, and every moment the space between them was shortening. The room had now contracted to half its height, so that I could scarcely stand upright. With bent back I hurried to the sides and saw that the interval between the floor and the walls was less than an inch—nevertheless there was a space, and suddenly a wild idea, born of desperation, struck me.

If I only had wedges I might check the upward course of the floor by jamming them between the edge of the floor and the walls. I had learnt the irresistible strength of wedges, and I glanced wildly round to see if there was anything I could possibly use for the purpose. Suddenly my eyes lighted on Frank's new oak stick. I had not thought of it before. I snatched at it. With the strength of a mad woman I broke it across my knees, and creeping to one side of the room thrust in the wedge I had made. I forced it well down. Like a flash I was at the opposite side, and had secured the remaining half of the stick between the wall

and the floor. My hands were bleeding as I forced the wedges between the walls of the ascending chamber. Would they hold? I lay on the floor, panting and exhausted. It began to creak and groan as it caught the

"When I returned this morning," he replied.

"Oh, tell me everything!"

"It is a ghastly story, Alice. Can you bear it?"

"Bear it!" I answered. "Remember, I have lived through it."

He patted me on my shoulder; he held both my hands in one of his; he did all that love could do to soothe me.

"There, that is better, little wife, and you are close to me, and nothing can ever hurt you again. Yes, I will tell you, if you wish me to. I hurried back, entered the house, and was going straight to your room when I heard cries and groans issuing from the lower part of the house. In terror I rushed downstairs. Guided by the



strain of the wedges, and I saw the wood gradually compressed, and I knew that the wedges had taken a firm hold. The ceiling was now not 3ft. above my face; but the ceiling, the room itself, everything grew dim. Then it was dark, and I knew no more.

When I came to myself I was lying on my bed in my own room. Frank was bending over me. With a rush the memory of my ghastly experience returned to my mind. I uttered a cry and covered my face.

"It is all right now, my darling," said Frank. "Lie still."

"Oh, tell me—tell me how you found me!" I said. I rose to a sitting posture, flung my arms tightly round his neck, and clung to him, trembling all over.

"Keep quiet, Alice; you are absolutely safe, and the danger is past. Drink this, darling, and lie still."

He held some hot tea to my lips. I took a few sips, and then, pushing his hand aside, I continued:—

"My mind will have no rest until I know everything. When did you find me?"

shrieks, I found myself in a cellar where a man was crouching in a frenzy of acute mania. The moment he saw me he became quiet. He put his finger to his lips and said, slowly: 'I have just killed the last person who wished to come into possession. I will show you how I did it.' He took my hand and pointed out the devilish engine by which he disposed of his victims. He entered into full particulars and explained how he managed the most horrible death-trap in the world. I didn't dare to stir; I hardly breathed until he had made all clear.

"'You understand,' he said then, and he grinned in my face. 'Two of those who longed to possess my inheritance disappeared and were never seen again. I marked out their faces on the ceiling. Grinning and devilish they look. The third victim now lies above. She was young and pretty—she is not pretty now. Will you come and see for yourself?'

"'First of all I will dispose of you,' was my answer, and with one strong stroke I felled him to the ground. I had given him a blow on the head which stunned him; he lay quiet. In a moment I had tied his hands and arms securely to his sides and had



"I FELLER HIM TO THE GROUND."

fastened his legs together, and then I dragged him into one of the empty rooms. I locked him in. My next work was to rescue you. My God! Alice, how did you think of the wedges? It was a master-stroke."

"Never mind now," I answered, "I will tell you all my story by-and-by. I want to hear your side of the horror. Tell me how that awful floor ascended—how you got it to go down again. I can have no rest until I understand."

"You shall come with me at once," was Frank's answer. "If you must know everything, come at once."

He led the way and I followed him. We went into the cellars, and the whole hideous mechanism of the chamber where I had nearly lost my life was made plain. In the west wing there had been, as I have already said, three rooms with pillars. On the previous night I had noticed that one of these rooms was without its central support. The knowledge flashed through my brain, making little impression under the awful circumstances in which I found myself, but now the meaning of everything was made clear. Two of the rooms were of the ordinary type, and the pillars must evidently have been put in as a sort of blind. In the third room, the room where I had been

immured, the case was very different. I perceived this as I stood in the cellar just under the room. This pillar was passed through the permanent floor from the cellar underneath and rigidly fixed into a movable floor. It was practically a mast, fastened into an immensely strong wooden float, which rested at the bottom of a well, like a ship at the bottom of an empty lock. By letting water into the well the floor would rise to its fullest extent, and the under

surface of the

movable floor thus raised would form the ceiling of the room, the pillar being now in the centre of the room, as I had seen it when Frank and Mr. Bamfylde and I had examined it on the first evening. The movable floor thus formed an artificial ceiling, hiding the blurred faces, which were on the true ceiling. Thus, when the floor was up the faces were invisible; when down they were seen on the true ceiling. This accounted for their intermittent appearance.

An hour later a doctor from the nearest lunatic asylum arrived. He was accompanied by two or three strong attendants. The unfortunate madman was taken back to the asylum, where he died within the week. He never recovered even a gleam of reason, and the acute mania which caused him to try to take my life put an end to his own.

Some years have gone by, and Lauristown is now as cheerful and bright a home as any in the lovely county of Derbyshire, but the wing with the Blurred Faces has been pulled down. This was the one request I made to Frank, and he immediately agreed to it. On its site is a garden where gay flowers of all sorts bloom, and in process of time I trust the memory of that cursed wing and those terrible faces will be forgotten.



"'WHAT DO YOU MEAN?' I HISSED AGAIN IN HER FACE."

(See page 615.)

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Spangle-Winged.

BY L. T. MEADE AND CLIFFORD HALIFAX.



MAKE no excuse. The odds were in favour of virtue, a respectable life, and a happy conclusion when the time came for the curtain to fall. I had never suffered the pangs of hunger or the anxious throes of poverty—my health was good, and my intellect, I was proud to think, above the average. I was a scientist of no mean attainments, a medical man for whom one of the laurel wreaths of the profession was a possibility. Nevertheless I fell. I plead no excuse; on the contrary, I would heap upon myself every epithet of censure and contempt, for I of all men should have done differently. I fell, and I reap the consequences. As I write these words death is within a very measurable distance—a few more days, and that cold embrace will caress me.

But—to begin.

My name is George Matchen, and I am at the present time thirty-two years of age. I have a competence of about £800 a year; there has, therefore, never been any absolute need for me to earn my own living. I consider such a sufficiency rather a curse than a blessing; it cuts away from under a man's feet the natural desire for that work which means bread. I had bread without work, and although I had a strong predilection for the medical profession, when I found myself fully qualified it seemed that I could better serve my fellow-men by taking up what is known as preventive medicine than any other branch. It was my pleasure to follow in the footsteps of the great discoverers who undoubtedly are the lights of our profession. Such men as Koch, Pasteur, Professor Fraser, Sanarelli, and last, but not least, Dr. Patrick Manson, were beacon-lights to follow at a measurable distance. Manson's recent discoveries with regard to malaria aroused my deepest interest, and in the summer of last year I determined to make investigations on his lines for myself.

For this purpose I resolved to spend a month on the Campagna near Rome. I would, in imitation of those who had gone

before me, provide myself with a mosquito-proof hut with wire gauze doors and windows, and carry on my investigations in the most malarial district of this unhealthy spot. The cause of the spread of malaria was all but proved, but the wild hope animated me that it might be my happy privilege to discover the remedy. If I could prevent the organism taking effect in man, or eliminate it when once it had entered his body; and secondly, if the mosquito itself could be destroyed, malaria, one of the greatest curses to which the human race is liable, would cease to exist.

The mere thought of such a remote and glorious contingency made my somewhat cold heart beat fast and filled me with a laudable enthusiasm. Yes, if I was anything I was a scientist, but I had another passion. This passion had grown with my growth, until silently but surely it had assumed big proportions.

I was deeply and I may say remorselessly in love with a young girl of the name of Rachel Denza. I say remorselessly, for as the sequel will prove my love was absolutely and completely selfish. I had known Rachel since she was a child. Her father was a distinguished colonel in the Army, who at the time of this story had retired from the Service. Colonel Denza adored his only child, and Rachel lived for her father. In my eyes she was extremely beautiful, although I cannot analyze her features. Her whole personality had long ago taken such complete possession of my heart that I had lifted her quite out of the ordinary region of young womanhood. When she appeared a soft sunshine seemed to come with her, a gentle warmth to emanate from her gracious young presence, and a complete and absolute contentment to visit me. I spoke little in her presence—I never made love to her in the ordinary sense—to be with her was sufficient. That she could ever be the wife of another I dismissed as an impossibility. For years I had claimed her as my own property, and that without

any sanction on her part. If she guessed that I loved her she never said so. We were excellent friends; Rachel gave me almost as many confidences as if I were her brother, and I make little doubt now that she had not the most remote idea of the passionate feelings which animated my breast when I looked at her.

It was on the day before I left England for my labours on the Campagna that I first ventured to speak openly to Miss Denza. I had written to request a private interview, but my letter had not at all prepared her for what took place. She was startled, not so much by the vehemence of my words as by my looks and actions, for when I saw that she was unprepared for my declaration of love I grew strangely agitated, restless, and unlike myself. I paced the room; I struggled



"I PACED THE ROOM."

to restrain my emotion. When I saw her cheeks turn white and her eyes avoid mine, anguish, which I little supposed could ever visit my heart, took possession of me. But for long years I had been training in self-control, and I soon managed to compose myself.

"I have taken you by surprise," I said; "but you know at last. Your answer, Rachel, your answer!"

"You have startled and distressed me," she began.

"You can leave all that out," was my reply. "Rachel, is it yes or no?"

"I cannot marry you, George," she said then, "for I do not love you."

This was a staggerer. I tried hard to win her to make an admission of regard for me. She was frightened, but very steadfast in her words.

"I shall never marry any man whom I do not love," she said.

"Is it possible you can look me in the face and say that you do not love me?" I said.

She did look me full in the face then, and her reply, low and quiet, fell on my heart like lead.

"Yes," she said.

"Then you have deceived me all these years."

"I have never willingly deceived you. I had no idea of this; I am terribly pained and sorry."

I turned from her, rage as well as agony choking my voice. Once again I regained my self-control, and then I said, in a low voice:—

"You say that you will only marry a man whom you love?"

"That is so."

"Then you will marry me."

"I do not love you."

"I shall make you love me; when you love me you will marry me."

"I shall never love you in that way," she answered.

"You will," I replied.

"Rachel, listen. Make up your mind, prepare yourself for what is going to happen. You will never marry any man but me; as there is a

God in Heaven, I swear that I will be your husband, and no one else."

She started away and I noticed an expression of fear coming into her eyes. I did not say any more, but my mind was made up. If I had intended Rachel to be mine before I asked her, I was now like a man possessed on the subject.

The next day I went to Rome. The time of year was favourable for my project, Rome being distinctly malarial in the month of August. I began to make my investigations at once. My experiments from the first were more for the possible cure of malaria than on the cause of its dissemination, but in order to attain the one I had to investigate the other. It is now no secret that the parasite which causes malaria in the human subject is to be found within the bodies of certain mosquitoes. The special mosquito which disseminates this terrible disease has spotted wings and lays boat-shaped eggs. For the purpose of this story it is unnecessary to go too much into the scientific question, it being sufficient to say that when this mosquito has a meal off a man infected with malaria it can, and does, convey the disease to the next healthy person whom it bites. Up to the present only the mosquito with spangled wings, the anopheles, has been discovered which is capable of conveying this dire infection from man to man, but in all probability there are many others of the species which can perform equally deadly work. As anopheles abounded on the portion of the Campagna where I had placed my hut I had abundant opportunities of studying them. Having taken the necessary precautions, and being in any case, as I considered, impervious to the bite of the mosquito, I remained free from the dread disease, and could occupy myself all day long in watching the natives of the place, who suffered much from the most malignant type of malaria, taking notes with regard to their various symptoms and examining the anopheles themselves. Thus I was occupied from morning till night, but it was when I lay down to sleep that the thought of Rachel returned to me. My madness with regard to her grew greater, not less. Each day I was more firmly resolved to make her my wife at any cost, and to inspire in her some of the passion for me which I felt so strongly for her. I had been a month on the Campagna when one morning I received the following letter:—

"MY DEAR GEORGE,—After our last painful interview I feel that it is only due to us both that I should inform you at as early a date as possible of my engagement."

The letter fell from my hands—an ugly word dropped from my lips. I was conscious of a strange faintness round my heart; then, uttering a savage curse, I sprang to my feet, took up Rachel's letter, and as I paced the narrow limits of the hut continued to read it.—

"I have just promised to marry Captain Channing, of the ——— Lancers, whose regiment acted so brilliantly in the late Boer campaign. Geoffrey was invalided home, and we met a few weeks ago at the house of my cousins, the Pryors. From the first we liked each other, and when he asked me to be his wife I found that I loved him, and gladly accepted him. I do not mind telling you, George, who have always been my good friend, that I love Geoffrey with all my heart, and look forward with delight to our future. I hope you will send me your congratulations. I am the happiest girl in existence. You will be glad to know this, I am sure."

"I hope you are progressing satisfactorily with your work—some people say that it is a dangerous time to be in Rome. I only wish, my dear George, I could introduce you to Geoffrey.—Yours sincerely, RACHEL DENZA."

To this letter I sent an immediate and brief reply.

"MY DEAR RACHEL," I wrote,—*"I wish you happiness and prosperity. I consider Captain Channing a lucky man. Pray invite me to your wedding, and may our friendship continue.—Yours sincerely, GEORGE MATCHEN."*

I posted this letter myself in Rome, and then returned down the Appian Way to my hut on the Campagna.

As I walked, looking outwardly calm and quiet enough, I was, within, nothing short of a smouldering volcano. The threat which I used in Rachel's presence was no idle one, and although I had written to her with such apparent coolness, I was resolved at any cost to carry it out to the bitter end. Rachel should never marry Channing; Rachel should be my wife at any cost. When a man gives himself over to such feelings as now animated me he is in danger of losing his mental balance, but I was naturally cool and wise, and had not the slightest idea of handing myself over to the penalties of the law. There was a strange beating in my heart and an answering pulse in my temples. Inwardly I was as a man torn and wronged. Between me and the time before I had received Rachel's letter spread an immeasurable distance. Before the arrival of that letter I was practically a humane scientist who loved his work and wished to benefit his fellow-men. Now, every thought was concentrated on one idea—how could I frustrate Channing, how could I make Rachel my wife? Before I slept that night I took the first step towards my terrible fall. I had a distant cousin of the

name of Marian Fletcher. She was a tall, dark, handsome girl, dashing in appearance and up-to-date in manner. She was the sort of woman I had always cordially disliked, but unfortunately for me I had the extreme penalty of attracting her. I was not conceited enough to suppose that she loved me, although I did know that I had always exercised an influence over her. From our earliest days Marian would do my bidding, and, imperious and wilful to others, would be little less than a slave to me. Now it occurred to me that she was the sort of woman to be my tool. Marian was visiting friends in the south of England. I knew her address, for we kept up a rather perfunctory correspondence, at least on my part. I wrote to her now on ordinary matters, but in the course of the letter I mentioned that I had heard of Rachel's engagement, and I begged Marian to furnish me with any particulars she could with regard to the character, ways of life, and circumstances of Captain Channing. In about a week's time I received a reply to this letter. Its contents were of deeper interest than even I had hoped.

"MY DEAR GEORGE," wrote Marian,—"In reply to your letter I have a good deal to say. It is in my power to give you much information with regard to Rachel Denza's engagement. In the first place, the marriage between her and Captain Channing must be performed between now and the 1st of January next year, for by the will of Geoffrey Channing's late uncle, Sir Edward Marbury, he loses a large estate unless he marries before that date. Geoffrey is well off even without this money, but with it he will be an extremely rich man, able to give his wife every luxury. Now,

pray listen to the divers and sundry chances which this world sometimes offers. You will start when I tell you that Geoffrey and I are first cousins; that Sir Edward Marbury was the uncle with whom I spent the greater part of my youth; and

that if by any chance Geoffrey fails to marry before the 1st of January has expired, I, Marian Fletcher, come in for the property which he loses. I have no wish, believe me, to deprive him of his money, for I have abundance of my own; but at the same time his engagement more than interests me. When our uncle's will was read and this curious proviso was discovered Geoffrey was very angry and said he would never marry anyone, fortune or no fortune, except for love. Now, my dear George, I believe that Geoffrey has absolutely kept his word. Until he met Rachel he had never loved any woman. You ask about his character—he is honourable, good-looking, and by



FROM A SAVAGE CURSE, I SPRANG TO MY FEET

most people considered a very captivating man. I am fully convinced that he would far rather lose the fortune which will be his on the day he marries Rachel than satisfy the conditions of his uncle's will without love. Can any woman praise a man further? Well, luck attend him—he has won a prize amongst women. There seldom was a more beautiful woman than Rachel; you know that. She is not without means on her own account, although she could scarcely be called wealthy; but that fact matters little, for Rachel is in love; yes, George, madly, desperately in love, and love has transformed her. It has added to her beauty and accentuated her grace. She is now one of the most lovely women I have ever seen. They both make a splendid couple. It is

good to see two people so happy ; or, George Matchen—is it good ? Does it not stir certain qualities in the hearts of the spectators which are not altogether those of virtue ? Forgive me, I have sometimes fancied that you had a tender place in your heart for the beautiful Miss Denza. Do you too lose by this marriage ?—then we ought to sympathize one with the other, for if you lose the woman I lose the fortune. Have I anything more to tell you ? Oh, yes. Colonel Denza has not been well and his doctors have ordered him to winter in Cairo. The entire party go to Egypt about the middle of November, where they will remain until after the wedding. Captain Channing of course accompanies them, and so also does your humble servant. Rachel in a letter which I have just received says she has heard from you and that you have given her your congratulations. Are these straight from your heart ? I query. — Yours sincerely, MARIAN FLETCHER."

Marian's letter was the beginning of a frequent correspondence between us, the result being that the day came when I packed my traps, took my mosquito-hut to pieces, and started for Egypt a week after the Denzas had gone there. I too had made up my mind to winter in Cairo. The Denzas and their party put up at the Continental Hotel, but I took rooms at Sheppard's. For various reasons I preferred not to be under the same roof as Rachel. But I had not been six hours in Cairo before we met. I went to the Continental, and she greeted me in the great hall which forms one of the principal features of the place. Several visitors were standing about, and there was no one to notice the man who walked gravely forward and shook hands with the lovely girl who stood up and greeted him. No one could guess in the grave face of this man, in his few courteous words, that the passion of a murderer was consuming his heart.

"How well you look, George," said Rachel, and it seemed to me at that instant that she mocked me.

There was a wild beating in my ears, and her next words were almost inaudible. Then emotion passed away and I became watchful, circumspect, and resolved at any cost to hide my feelings.

"I must introduce you to Geoffrey," she said. "It is so good of you to have come to Cairo ; your presence will just make our party complete. Ah, and here is Geoffrey."

She moved a step or two away, said something to a man who advanced to meet us,

and the next moment Captain Channing and I had met. I looked him all over, taking his measure at a glance. When my eyes lit upon his well-formed face, his open and handsome brown eyes ; when I perceived how kind Nature had been in giving him not only all the exterior attributes of manly beauty, but had further endowed him with a right, good, and honourable heart, I hated him with intense satisfaction. It was more agreeable to me in my present mood to hate than to love, but I had to be wary.

My conversation as I talked to Channing was light and agreeable ; our laughter rang out. Presently Colonel Denza and Marian appeared. Although we both knew that we should meet in Cairo we each of us expressed surprise at seeing the other.

"How nice this is !" said Marian, and as she spoke she looked me full in the face, and I beheld in her big, black eyes a look of *knowledge*. I felt uncomfortable—she seemed to read me through. But she quickly put me at my ease by suggesting that we should all sit out on the moonlit terrace and enjoy our coffee and cigarettes. Towards the end of the evening Rachel and I found ourselves for a moment alone. She turned immediately and just touched my hand with hers.

"How good you are, George !" she said. "You make me so happy. It is kind of you to be nice to Geoffrey."

"But why should I not be friendly, my dear Rachel ?" was my answer.

She raised her brows a very little.

"It makes me happy," she said, simply.

I knew what she was thinking of. She was quite silent for a moment, and the moonlight fell on her slender figure. She looked, I thought, ethereal.

"I cannot help thinking of your words," she began.

I interrupted her.

"Rachel," I said, in a hoarse voice, "let the curtain drop between the past and the present ; a man is not accountable for what he says when he is mad."

"And you are sane now, George, are you not ?" she asked, in a tone of great relief.

"Absolutely."

"How glad I am ! You do not mind my talking to you now and then of my great happiness ?"

"I treat me as your old friend, Rachel, and tell me what you will."

"We are to be married," she said, "two days after Christmas, in a little over three weeks. We are going to India for our wedding trip."

I bowed.

"You will be present at my wedding, will you not, George?"

"Certainly," I answered. I said this with marked emphasis, for as I intended to be the bridegroom on that auspicious occasion I should, of course, not be absent.

A moment later I took my leave. As I was going from the Continental to Shepherd's Hotel, a distance of a few yards, I saw under the shade of the big terrace the figure of Marian Fletcher. She stretched out her hand as I passed and touched me.

"You did it very well indeed," she said, "and you gave yourself away to no one but me."

"What do you mean by saying that, Marian?" I replied.

"I have acquired the power of reading your heart," she answered. "It is a subtle one, George Matchen, but I have the gift of reading it through and through."

"May I not see you back to the Continental?" was my answer.

"You may when we have walked up and down here in the shade. I came out on purpose. No one will see us, and even if anyone does I do not care. We are old friends, and I must know exactly the part I am to play."

"The part you are to play?" I replied, my heart beating quickly.

"I intend to help you," she answered, and she laid her hand on my arm.

Rachel's hand was the last to touch me.

It seemed to me now that Marian's touch was profanation. I started away, almost rudely. She observed the gesture, and her black eyes flashed.

"The wedding takes place in three weeks," she said. "You are agreeable, of course?"

"It shall never take place," I answered, in a low voice. "I have vowed, and I mean to keep my vow."

"Bravo!" she answered me. "I thought as much. George, I too have good reason to wish this marriage not to take place."

"By the way, of course you have," I replied. "How much money comes to you if Channing fails to marry before the 1st of January?"

"My late uncle's house and estate, and something like £50,000 in Consols. A big fortune," she continued, "but I do not care so much for that; something else influences me."

"What?" I asked.

"You," she replied. "You, George Matchen. Do you not know that I love you?"

"Do not say it, Marian," I answered, hoarsely.

"It is easy to say 'Don't,'" she replied, "when the deed is done, and when nothing can alter facts. Do you know how many men I have refused for your sake? And, yes, even if I do receive that fortune, I vow that I will marry no one but you. You have made a vow to marry one woman, while another woman has made a vow to marry you. Now you see your position."

I laughed somewhat ruefully.

"You do not put things too pleasantly," I said.

"You will acquiesce by-and-by, for you must," she replied. "But we must both clearly understand. You do not wish the marriage—we both have strong reasons why it should never take place. We both intend to act with cleverness, we both intend to hide our real feelings; that is enough for to-night, our further consideration must be how we are to take the steps we wish to take."

"Aye," I said. "Good-night, Marian."

She did not take my hand this time; she glided away. I returned to my hotel, but not to sleep.



"I EXAMINED MY TREASURES."

During my recent experiments on the Campagna I had followed Manson's discoveries. The spangle-winged mosquito, small, light as air, almost transparent, scarcely visible to the naked eye, carried within its tiny body a weapon of death almost as sure and certain as the assassin's knife.

Before leaving the precincts of that malarial district I had secured several of these mosquitoes in a bottle. The bottle was, of course, provided with a breathing apparatus, and in order to keep the insects alive I fed them on bananas, but I knew that in order to insure the truth of Manson's theory I must give the mosquitoes a malarial victim to feed upon. How could I find such a victim?

To-night I examined my treasures. I held the bottle between myself and the light. They seemed in good condition. I lay down to sleep in the small hours and my sleep was troubled by dreams. I awoke early, jumped up and dressed hastily. After breakfast I determined to pass away the morning hours in the far-famed bazaars. As I walked there now through the crowded streets, the air, light, dry, exhilarating, insensibly cheered my spirits; the weight which had lain against my heart lifted, and although my mind was irrevocably made up I determined to enjoy the present. As I strolled along the narrow streets, knocking up against Arabs and Egyptians as I did so, and finally entered under the low portal which led to the bazaars, I wondered if I should meet Rachel here. Most girls like to visit these homes of curiosities and articles of *vertu*. I thought of Rachel and of her alone as I passed between the gaily set-out counters, and listened to the eager remarks of the merchants as they advertised their wares. I thought of Rachel's glorious eyes, the ring in her voice, the immeasurable comfort which one glance at her afforded me. I should be a madman indeed if I did not make a frantic struggle to secure so great a prize. I walked on and on, shouted to in broken English by the Arabs as they stood behind their counters. But the moonstones, the turquoises, the bracelets, the necklets, the kerchiefs, the rich embroideries, did not attract me; I saw them without seeing them. Presently I passed right through the bazaar of varieties, down through the Turkish quarters, and into the Silver Bazaar. Here one could see the metal itself formed into bangles, bracelets, and brooches before one's eyes. It was the fashion for each visitor in Cairo to visit this special bazaar. A more

dangerous and hideous-looking place it was scarcely possible to find. There was barely room for me to walk between the stalls; men of all Eastern nationalities, Arabs, Egyptians, Bedouins, Syrians, peered at me as I passed by. The crafty face of a Greek looked into mine; the suave, smooth, expressionless countenance of an Arab was within a foot or two of my own face. It would, I knew, be easy for these men to bind me hand and foot, to rob and murder me, and there would be an end for all time of George Matchen; but no one was interested in me to that extent. I passed by, buying nothing and exciting no comment whatsoever. I was just about to come out again when a man who was standing by a counter and examining some soft silver bangles attracted my attention. The place was lit artificially, and the flame of a torch fell on his face. I stopped when I saw him, and a spasm of mingled agony and delight crossed my heart. He was a sad-looking object—his face was so thin that the bones all but protruded; it was sallow, too, with a sickly sallowness which spoke of deranged liver and blood-poisoning; his black eyes were sunken in his head; he coughed as he spoke, and as I approached him and stared almost rudely into his face I saw him shiver as if with sudden rigor. Beyond doubt, dark as was his complexion, he was a European—perhaps an Englishman; beyond doubt, also, he was suffering from malaria. I knew this at once; I knew also that the malaria which was draining his life-blood was of the kind known as malignant. Now, all malarias are intermittent, and this man was in the stage of this fell disease when the fever for a short time had relaxed its grip. He completed his bargain with the silver merchant and I followed him out of the bazaar. He took no notice whatever of me, but walked languidly, tottering slightly as he did so. Suddenly he almost fell. This was my opportunity. I went quickly to his side and offered him my arm.

"You are ill," I said, speaking in French. "Can I assist you to a carriage?"

He replied to me at once in excellent English.

"I was mad to come out," he said. "Thank you for your courtesy. I shall be very much obliged if you will see me into a victoria."

I observed that he was past all other speech. I led him gently to the end of the street and put him into a carriage. He gave the driver the name of the Continental Hotel. Again there came a grip at my



"I WENT QUICKLY TO HIS SIDE AND OFFERED HIM MY ARM."

heart, but this time it was altogether one of satisfaction.

Cairo is perhaps the last place on earth where malaria is to be found; the extreme dryness of the climate makes such a disease all but impossible. This man, therefore, must have come to Cairo already attacked. I needed such a victim. Beyond doubt he was the tool to execute the deadly work which I had in hand. That evening I had a private conversation with Marian.

"There is a man under this roof very ill," I said. "Do you happen to know about him?"

"Are you alluding to Mr. Aldis?" she said at once.

"Perhaps so," I replied. "I met a man to-day at the Silver Bazaar; he was suffering from malignant malaria. Oh, it is not infectious; you need not start. I helped him to a carriage and he gave the address of this hotel. I am interested."

Then I looked at her and stopped speaking. Her face became watchful and eager.

"Tell me something about malaria," she said, in a whisper.

I hated her as she came nearer to me; I hated her still more when she lowered her voice; all the same, I knew I must use her.

"Malaria in all forms is deadly," I said. "It works havoc on the constitution. Malignant malaria as a rule kills, and quickly. The man I helped to-day will shortly die."

"Could you not be of service to this suffering individual?" was her next question, made after a pause. "There is doubtless," she continued, "no one else in Cairo who has so thoroughly studied the deadly complaint."

"That I am sure is the case," I replied.

"Perhaps you would like to see Mr. Aldis?"

I looked full at her, then I lowered my eyes.

"Wait a moment," she said. "I know the manager—I will go and speak to him."

She jumped up and left me. In a few minutes she returned to my side.

"I think Mr. Aldis will see you," she said, in a whisper. "A message has been sent to his apartments. He is very ill this evening, but refuses to see any of the doctors of the place. It is possible, therefore, that he may give you the pleasure of prescribing for him."

"Then, in that case," I answered, abruptly, "I will leave the hotel for a few minutes. If a message comes in my absence keep it for me, will you?"

I went straight to Shepherd's. I reached my own room. There I took a bottle which contained my pet mosquitoes from its hiding-place and held it between me and the light. Opening this bottle with extreme care I transferred two of the winged insects to another and smaller bottle. These I christened on the spot Lucifer and Diabolus. I smiled strangely as I watched their attenuated, shadowy forms. They immediately settled themselves at the bottom of the bottle. They looked languid; doubtless they were weak for want of their proper food.

"I am prepared, my friends, to give you a meal to-night," I said to them.

I slipped the bottle into my pocket and went back to the hotel.

"Oh, George," said Rachel, the moment I appeared, "there is a poor man dreadfully ill upstairs; the concierge has been to inquire for you; the man, a Mr. Aldis, wants to know if you will pay him a professional visit."

"With pleasure," I replied. "Ah, there is the concierge; I will speak to him."

I went up to the man, said a few words, and a moment later was taken up in the lift to Aldis's room. He had a large room on the third floor. The man flung open the door, announced—"Dr. George Matchen," and shut it behind him. The patient was bending over a wood fire in all the first rigor of a terrible attack.

"How do you do?" he said, just nodding to me and speaking with difficulty, for his teeth chattered so. "I have to thank you for your kindness to-day; I did not know, then, that I was being helped by a doctor, and one who the manager tells me has specially studied the infernal disease which is bringing me to the grave. I do not suppose you can do anything for me, but all the same it is kind of you to call."

"I may possibly be able to give you a little relief," was my reply. Then I sat down by his side and asked him a few questions.

He was far gone, indeed, with acute malignant malaria. He told me he had contracted it in New Guinea, that the attacks were becoming more and more frequent and his strength less and less. He had fled from the deadly place to Cairo hoping to recover, but his own supposition was that he was too deeply imbued with the disease for any chance of cure, and was to a certainty dying.

"I shall never go out again," he said, "until I am carried from here. I have declined, however, to go to a hospital, and I do not want a nurse; I can manage myself."

As he spoke he cowered yet nearer to the fire. I took out my glass bottle and, unobserved by him, removed the cork and let one of the spangle-winged mosquitoes free. I then turned and sat down near the patient.

I tried to draw him to talk on other matters, but he was too ill even to answer my questions. I knew that I was cruel, almost brutal; but was he not my tool—should I not be a madman to lose this chance of acquiring what I desired? Presently there sounded on my ears the well-known musical hum of a mosquito. It came nearer and yet nearer;

passing me by, it selected the sick man as its victim. A moment later and my spangle-winged beauty alighted on the invalid's hand. He immediately raised the other hand to brush it off, but before he could do so I interposed.

"One moment," I cried; "this is most curious. Let me secure this mosquito; it is surely not one of the ordinary kind one finds here."

As I spoke I laid my hand lightly on the mosquito. It fluttered in its unwelcome prison. I put it back into my bottle. The invalid gazed at me in astonishment.

"The brute has bitten me," he said. "It is early in the year for mosquitoes in Cairo, but I have been bitten before."

"Indeed," I answered, with eagerness. "Yes, I see you have mosquito curtains round your bed."

"The season has been so warm that they have never died off as is their usual habit," was his answer. "But excuse me, doctor, I think I shall get into bed; the second stage of my disease is approaching."

I now changed my manner and helped him to the utmost of my ability. I sat with him until the fury of the attack had spent itself, and it was late before I left his room.

From that hour Frank Aldis was my patient. I visited him once or twice a day. I spoke to my friends downstairs of the interesting case which had come under my notice. I specially mentioned how extremely favourable it was for my special investigations. Marian watched me morning, noon, and night—she was intensely interested; Captain Channing mildly so; but Rachel scarcely listened to me. For the time she was altogether absorbed; it was her nature to be polite to everyone, but I could see that she lived in a dream-world, and only Captain Channing's voice and Captain Channing's face had power to make her heart awake. I saw the light of love in her eyes whenever she looked at him—but for that look which was never directed towards me I might have paused and considered; as it was I was obdurate. I had now fed all my mosquitoes one by one from the veins of my malarious patient, but *Lucifer* and *Diabolus* I still kept in a bottle by themselves—they were fully primed to do what destruction lay in their power. Meanwhile the days flew. Christmas Day arrived, and two days afterwards the wedding was to take place. On that day Marian watched me much as a cat watches a mouse. As to Captain Channing and Rachel, they were more and

more absorbed in each other. On Christmas night I knew that the time had come to strike. For this purpose I must secure the services of Marian Fletcher. I asked her, therefore, as the evening approached to stroll with me on the terrace. The night was balmy, like an English midsummer. There were several guests sitting about; the waiters in their quaint Oriental costumes were darting here and there supplying the different small tables with coffee and cigarettes. Marian and I moved into the shade where no one walked or lingered.

"Well?" she said.

I turned to her. "Will you help me?" I asked.

"On a condition," she replied, very slowly.

"You come in for the fortune, Marian, that is the condition."

"You marry me, George. That is my condition," she answered.

I looked her full in the eyes.

"You ask the impossible," I said. "I want to remove a certain man from my path because I love the girl who is engaged to him. How can you expect me to marry you?"

"This is a case of revenge," she answered, lightly. "You deprive Rachel Denza of her lover and her fortune, but you marry me afterwards. The whole thing is well conceived, and I can and will help you."

I was silent, thinking hard. I could not do what I intended to do without her help; at the same time nothing on this earth would induce me to marry her.

"Listen, Marian," I said, softly. "What we do we must do to-night. You and I step down from the paths of respectability and enter the shady

paths of crime—deliberate and wicked crime—to-night. We will talk of the conditions afterwards. If you fail to help me on this night, which is already upon us, it will be too late."

"In any case I get the fortune," she said, softly, under her breath. "What am I to do to-night, Dr. Matchen?"

I took a glass bottle from my pocket.

"In this," I said, "is a mosquito."

She laughed.

"Really," she answered; "we descend from the sublime to the ridiculous. I am not partial to mosquitoes; one got inside my curtains last night and bit me savagely on my neck; my neck is inflamed. Did you not notice the ugly mark at dinner?"

"I did not," I replied. "But listen, pray. There are mosquito curtains, are there not, round all the beds?"

"Of course."

"In what room does Captain Channing sleep, Marian?"

"On the same corridor with the rest of our party. All our rooms adjoin; his is the farthest off, then Colonel Denza's, then mine, then Rachel's."

"Then your course is easy," I answered. "Pray go upstairs some time this evening when no one is by, enter Captain Channing's room, open the curtains of his bed, and let the insect which rests in this bottle have its freedom *inside* the curtains. When you are quite certain that it is safe within, tuck the curtains down again and come away. The work is easy," I continued, and I gave a light laugh.

"Work easy, pay heavy," she answered.

Just then a waiter carrying a tray with glasses



THEY WERE A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN.

passed us. The reflection of a bright light in one of the rooms of the hotel caused the glasses to gleam. There was a second reflection on Marian's face and on mine.

"You look like a murderer," she hissed, "and you want me to be one, too."

"Ask no questions," I replied. "What is a mosquito? Keep your secret. If you do your work well you will at least be an heiress, one of the richest women in England. —There."

I thrust the bottle which contained Diabolis into her hand. Diabolis was full-fed and ripe to pursue his deadly work.

The next morning, by invitation, I breakfasted at the Continental with the Denzas. The whole party were in high spirits. Captain Channing, in particular, looked in radiant health; but I noticed to my own intense satisfaction that he rubbed his cheek, and I observed the small but sure bite of a mosquito in the little red patch which irritated him. Rachel's eyes met mine; she noticed the direction of Captain Channing's hand, and, bending towards him, said:—

"So you were the victim last night?"

"What do you mean?" he asked, turning to her.

"I was bitten the night before; I see that those horrid creatures attacked you last night."

"Do you mean the mosquitoes?" he asked, immediately. "It is surprising that they should be active at this time of the year. Of course, one knows there are always a few in Cairo, but a most persistent brute had got into my mosquito curtains; it worried me indescribably: I managed, however, to kill it at last."

So Diabolis was dead! I smiled grimly to myself. Captain Channing jumped up and asked Rachel if she had finished breakfast. They went out together; Marian and I found ourselves alone.

"When will the poison begin to work?" she asked.

"Hush!" I replied. "Walls have ears."

"But when?" she persisted.

"Probably this afternoon."

"Is one dose sufficient?"

"It would be safer to give a second," was my answer, after a moment's hesitation. "Can you help me to do this, Marian?"

"Certainly I can. Will you let me have the bottle which contains the insect before night?"

I nodded. She looked full at me.

"You clearly understand what my collaboration in this matter implies?"

"You get the money," was my answer.

"And the man," she continued.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"You know, Miss Fletcher," I said, "that I only love one woman, Rachel Denza."

"And she is good," replied Marian, slowly. "A nice husband you would make for a good woman! You had much better be content with me. Like ought to mate with like in this world. I at least shall never reproach you, for we shall both be in the same box."

I made no answer. Not one single thrill of remorse had visited me. If I ever had a heart it was now hard as iron. I was only thinking of the result which a second dose of poison would certainly produce. Rachel, deprived both of fortune and lover, must assuredly turn to me. My work could not be spoilt now. I must soothe and satisfy Marian later on, but at any cost she must complete what she had begun.

Just then Rachel came up to us. Her face was a little pale and a trifle anxious.

"I am so glad you have not gone," she said, eagerly. "Geoffrey is not well; he complains of shivering and headache. It is impossible that he could have caught malaria, but certainly the symptoms seem very like those from which Mr. Aldis suffers."

"Do not be anxious," I replied. "Malaria is not infectious in the ordinary sense, but I will go and see him; where is he?"

"He has gone to his room to lie down; he feels very sick."

"Better and better," I whispered to myself.

I ran upstairs and saw Channing. He had slight rigor, which I knew would soon increase; he had also sick headache. He could not understand his own sensations.

"Give me something to put me right, won't you, Matchen?" he said, when he saw me. "It is no end of a nuisance to be knocked up to-day, for remember I marry Rachel to-morrow."

"That you do not, sir," was my inward comment.

Aloud I said:—

"I will prescribe something for you, and the main thing is not to worry."

I went downstairs and ordered a harmless compound. It was by no means my intention to cut the attack short, even if I could do so.

In the evening I inquired for Captain Channing. He was now very ill, indeed, and all thought of to-morrow's ceremony was abandoned. Colonel Denza was anxious and spoke to me.

"I hope Channing will be able to be

married on the following day," he said. "You have doubtless heard of the curious will which provides him a fortune if he takes to himself a wife before or on the first of the New Year?"

"I have heard of it," I replied, briefly. "He is suffering from malaria, and there are symptoms which point to a malignant type, but I hope the attack will have died down by the morning."

Colonel Denza looked very anxious. I saw that I was not wanted, and went back to my hotel.

I returned later to put my glass bottle into Marian Fletcher's hand.

"I am appointed nurse," she said, "for the time being; you see how everything suits, but do not forget our bargain."

I nodded to her and went away. Again, that night, callous wretch that I was, I slept, but I awoke early and went to the hotel. Captain Channing had got over the first acute attack, and was lying on his pillows, languid, weak, and indifferent. Rachel was

standing in the room; she turned when she saw me.

"This is our wedding-day," she said, "but Geoffrey says he cannot marry me to-day."

"Why, of course not," I replied. "How could you be so cruel as to expect it?"

She fell on her knees beside his couch and took one of his feverish hands in hers.

"I have a headache myself," she said, "it is caused by disappointment."

"Darling, I shall be all right to-morrow," he said, and, making an effort, he raised her little hand to his lips and kissed it.

The sight maddened me. I made a remark, ordered the prescription which I had made up yesterday to be renewed, and left the room. Colonel Denza was standing on the landing.

"Well," he said, "how is the patient? Any improvement?"

"There is not the least doubt, Colonel," I replied, "that Captain Channing is suffering from malignant malaria. The fact is he ought not to marry for some time."

"He must marry before the 1st. We must get through the ceremony somehow to-morrow."

"Ah," I answered, "I do not think you will."

"It is worse than provoking," said the Colonel. "I do not want to be heartless, believe me, Matchen, but to throw away such a fortune! Surely a great effort ought to be made to comply with the uncle's will."

"I will do my best," I answered. "But would you like to call in another doctor?"

"Certainly not; no one knows so much about malaria as you do."

Just then Rachel passed me, going languidly and very slowly to her room. I was struck by the feebleness of her step and followed her.

"Are you ill, Rachel?" I said. "Is this little disappointment more than you can bear?"

"Believe me, it is not the money," she answered, and tears filled her lovely eyes. "It is the sight of his suffering—the change in his face. Oh, you do not think he will die?"



WAS STRUCK BY THE FEEBLENESS OF HER STEP."

"No, no," I said, as soothingly as I could. "But you really are ill."

"I do not know what is the matter," she answered. "I feel much as Geoff did yesterday morning, shivery, tired, headachy."

"You are nervous," I replied. "You cannot possibly be contracting malaria. Now, go like a good girl and lie down."

She left me. Again I observed that feeble walk. She was a tall, strong girl, but she absolutely tottered as she went down the long corridor. Her walk reminded me of Aldis as he tottered up the street after leaving the Silver Bazaar.

I could not quite account for the strange, fierce nervousness which suddenly arose within me, nor could I in the least understand the vague fear which clutched at my heart and shook me to the foundations of my being. I went downstairs; Marian sat reading an English newspaper. She raised her eyes when I approached.

"All going well, eh?" she inquired.

I sat down near her.

"How can you look so cool and indifferent?" I said. "Sometimes I wonder if you are a woman at all."

"As much woman as you are man, dear sir," was her gentle response. "But how go the patients?"

"The patients!" I cried. "There is only one patient; he is bad enough, God knows."

"I fancy there are two," she replied.

"Two?" I cried. "Two?"

Then I remembered Rachel's condition. I looked full at Marian. My very heart stood still—the words I tried to utter froze on my lips.

"There are likely to be two," continued Marian, in a low tone. She stood up as she spoke. "Come out on the terrace, Dr. Matchen."

I followed her. The terrace was absolutely deserted. We stood side by side in the shade caused by the big hotel. The sunshine blazed hot everywhere else; a number of Arab women carrying necklaces, feathers, and other things to sell came up and proffered their wares. Marian ordered the women off with an imperious gesture.

"Dr. Matchen," she said, facing me and looking me full in the eyes, "I asked you for a promise last night you virtually refused to give. Remembering that man above all things is frail, weak, and uncertain, anxious to have his own way at any cost, but not anxious to perform that which is afterwards expected of him—to make all safe, I took the matter into my own hands. It does not

suit my wishes that Captain Channing should die and Rachel live, beautiful and free. I think you call your favourite mosquitoes Diabolis and Lucifer. Diabolis poisoned Captain Channing on the night of the 25th; Lucifer poisoned Rachel last night."

"What do you mean?" I cried.

I took her by her shoulders and turned her round.

"What do you mean?" I hissed again in her face.

"What I say. Take your hands off. I took the one step possible to take. They are both ill now, and it is—yes, your doing and mine. Cure them if you can."

I did not say a word—I was incapable of speech. I turned from Marian, walked across the hall of the big hotel, and, not waiting for the lift, bounded up the stairs three steps at a time to the third story. I turned down the corridor where the Denzas' rooms were situated. Rachel's door was slightly ajar; I heard voices within. Her father was standing by the bedside. The girl herself was lying on the bed; she had not troubled to undress, but from where I stood I noticed the frightful rigor which caused her to shiver from head to foot. Colonel Denza saw me, and asked me to enter.

"Ah, Matchen," he said, "you are the very man. What can you make of this? Are not Rachel's symptoms singularly like those from which Channing suffered yesterday?"

I went up to the bed and took the small, hot hand in my clasp. The pulse was galloping—it did not need me to lay my finger upon it to know that the girl's temperature was high.

"You must get into bed, Rachel," I said, as gently as I could speak. "You are more ill than I thought; I will get a nurse from the hospital to see after you."

"I am so cold," she answered, and her teeth chattered.

I bent towards her.

"Tell me," I said, "and speak truly. Were you bitten by anything last night?"

"Bitten?" she answered, pressing her hand to her eyes and pushing back her hair.

"How funny! I had forgotten. Of course I was. A mosquito got inside my curtains, it bit my little finger and my wrist; see how inflamed they are. I lit a candle and hunted for the little wretch, but could not find it. Oh, how my head aches; how giddy I am!"

"I will get you a nurse; we will soon have you all right," I said; but my face must have

belied my words. I motioned to Colonel Denza and we both left the room.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Matter!" I cried. "Only God knows. Your daughter is infected with the same horrible thing from which Captain Channing is suffering. Yes, they will be cured; they must be cured. I take it upon me to say that is almost a certainty; but they are both ill—alarmingly so. Get nurses from the hospital, my dear sir. Do not allow Miss Fletcher near them; any excuse—infection—what you like. I am off to—to do that which I mean to do."

"But the marriage—the marriage on the 1st!" cried the agonized father.

"Marriage!" I answered. "Colonel Denza, you may be thankful if you keep your daughter. Go on your knees to Almighty God and ask Him to spare her life. Do not keep me now."

"But where are you going?" he called after me. "Are there no immediate steps to be taken?"

"Yes, yes. Dose her with quinine, dose them both with quinine. I will prescribe the dose. Do not keep me, I beg of you."

I rushed from the hotel. I was like a madman, like one possessed; and yet, and yet, I was not as guilty as I had been when I awoke that morning. It was given to me at the eleventh hour to repent, to repent with the agony which lost souls must feel in purgatory. Little did I care then whether Rachel married the man she loved or not. All I required of the God who made her was her life.

"Oh, spare her young and beautiful life!" I cried, and then I thought no more of the past, but only of the present. I must take means.

While studying the great malarial question on the wide plains of the Campagna I had, as I have already stated, thought much of the possibility of a remedy or a cure—something which should destroy the parasites in the blood. I had already made extensive experiments in this direction, but hitherto, I must own, without marked success. Still, in moments when I could think clearly and devote my whole time to the question, I had wild dreams of a certain disinfectant which I called by the name of spirileen. Spirileen was a mixture of more than one strong disinfectant, and could be introduced by inoculation into a healthy or infected subject at will. Up to the present, as I have said, I had found no certain results, but I was nearly mad now, and determined, come what would, to try to inoculate Rachel.

I went to my rooms, shut myself in, worked up my subject carefully for a few hours, and then went back to the Continental. There was a hush and quiet over the place. Everyone in the hotel knew what had occurred: that the bride and bridegroom of to-morrow were both literally lying at death's door. The manager of the hotel looked disturbed; if it were known that an attack of malignant malaria was assailing his guests he himself would be ruined. He came to me to ask what it meant.

"Can you throw any light on the subject, sir?" was his inquiry. "Panic is beginning which will empty the hotel; several people have already gone. Mr. Aldis is so bad he is not expected to live out the day."

"What do you say?" I asked.

I started, turned, and faced him.

"Just what I say, sir. Mr. Aldis is not expected to hold out until night, and Miss Fletcher, one of your party, sir, has already started for Alexandria *en route* for England."

This was a relief which the man must have seen reflected in my face. I evaded any further questions from him and rushed upstairs. I went to Aldis's door and knocked. A feeble voice responded. I opened the door and entered. The man was lying weak unto death on his bed. He could scarcely speak, his face was cadaverous, the signs of approaching death were manifest.

If I saved him—and surely in such an extreme case any experiment was justifiable—then Rachel at such a much earlier stage of the complaint would be delivered. I went straight up to Aldis and bent over him.

"I am nearly gone," he said to me.

"I have something that I want to try," I said. "It is kill or cure. May I?"

He gave a vague nod; I doubt if he understood me. I had my syringe ready, and within two minutes I had inoculated him. I sat down by him then and waited for the result. I had watched his case for days now, and I knew when the fever would begin to return. It was due. The temperature ought to rise within half an hour. I sat and watched the clock as a man who is drowning watches to see whether the saving rope will reach him. When the clock struck I took Aldis's temperature. It was normal; there was no rise. I took it again in half an hour; still no rise.

"What is this?" I said. "Your attack is not coming back."

I observed that his eyes were a shade brighter. I gave him a stimulant. I sat

with him for another hour; still no rise of temperature, no sign of the terrible recurrence of the fever. Already he looked better; he was able to turn in bed and to watch me. I gave him a second dose of the disinfectant and then left him. My mind was made up; I went straight to Rachel's room.

She was in a paroxysm of extreme misery. The nurse whom Denza had summoned was seated by the bedside. Rachel was delirious; she did not know anyone.

"It is a very sharp attack, sir," said the nurse, in French.

"Yes," I answered, and then I took the girl's white hand and pushed up her sleeve, and introduced the spirileen.

I must not make my story too long. Suffice it to say that by a miracle, as it seemed to me, Rachel Denza, Captain Channing, and, last but not least, Mr. Frank Aldis crept back from the gates of death to the shores of life. Step by step I watched them as the cruel enemy withdrew and life and health and strength returned to their faces. They all spoke of me as their benefactor, and I, coward that I was, could not disillusionize them. There came a day when Channing and Rachel, quite well again, drove to church together and were made one by the officiating priest. On that day I crept to the church and stayed there and listened to the words which took Rachel from me for ever. But in reality

she had never been mine, and that which I had done in my madness had removed her immeasurable miles from me and my life. I was thankful that she was alive. I crept back to Shepheard's Hotel, for I was ill. I myself had been bitten by the deadly mosquitoes, heeding little what they did during those hours that I watched by Rachael's bed. Should I give myself the spirileen and so, perhaps, save my life? No; it seemed useless. The very desire for life had left me. Up to the present I had just strength to keep from my friends the fact that I was ill. I sat in my room between the raging paroxysms of fever and wondered what was before me. At least I might do one good. Spirileen, thought out by me, in very deed and truth my own discovery, the fruits of my months of labour, had proved efficacious. I would give my discovery to the world before I died. At intervals I had written my story, and there was just this one thing to add—the proportions and the natures of the disinfectants which made my protective. I took a sheet of paper and prepared to write

NOTE.—Dr. Matchen was found dead in his room, seated by his writing-table, his hand still holding his pen. The manuscript which lay by his side was carefully packed and forwarded to his friend, Colonel Denza.



THE MAN WHO DISAPPEARED



BY L. T. MEADE AND ROBERT EUSTACE.

I AM a lawyer by profession, and have a snug set of chambers in Chancery Lane. My name is Charles Pleydell. I have many clients, and can already pronounce myself a rich man.

On a certain morning towards the end of September in the year 1897 I received the following letter :—

SIR,—I have been asked to call on you by a mutual friend, General Cornwallis, who accompanied my step-daughter and myself on board the *Osprey* to England. Availing myself of the General's introduction, I hope to call to see you or to send a representative about eleven o'clock to-day.

The General says that he thinks you can give me advice on a matter of some importance.

I am a Spanish lady. My home is in Brazil, and I know nothing of England or of English ways. I wish, however, to take a house near London and to settle down. This house must be situated in the neighbourhood of a large moor or common. It must have grounds surrounding it, and must have extensive cellars or basements, as my wish is to furnish a laboratory in order to carry on scientific research. I am willing to pay any sum in reason for a desirable habitation, but one thing is essential : the house must be as near London as is possible under the above conditions.—Yours obediently, STELLA SCAIFFE.

This letter was dated from the Carlton Hotel.

Now, it so happened that a client of mine had asked me a few months before to try and let his house—an old-fashioned and somewhat gruesome mansion, situated on a lonely part of Hampstead Heath. It occurred to me that this house would exactly suit the lady whose letter I had just read.

At eleven o'clock one of my clerks brought

me in a card. On it were written the words, "Miss Muriel Scaiffe." I desired the man to show the lady in, and a moment later a slight, fair-haired English girl entered the room.

"Mrs. Scaiffe is not quite well and has sent me in her stead. You have received a letter from my step-mother, have you not, Mr. Pleydell?"

"I have," I replied. "Will you sit down, Miss Scaiffe?"

She did so. I looked at her attentively. She was young and pretty. She also looked good, and although there was a certain anxiety about her face which she could not quite repress, her smile was very sweet.

"Your step-mother," I said, "requires a house with somewhat peculiar conditions?"

"Oh, yes," the girl answered. "She is very anxious on the subject. We want to be settled within a week."

"That is a very short time in which to take and furnish a house," I could not help remarking.

"Yes," she said, again. "But, all the same, in our case it is essential. My step-mother says that anything can be done if there is enough money."

"That is true in a sense," I replied, smilingly. "If I can help you I shall be pleased. You want a house on a common?"

"On a common or moor."

"It so happens, Miss Scaiffe, that there is a place called The Rosary at Hampstead which may suit you. Here are the particulars. Read them over for yourself and tell me if there is any use in my giving you an order to view."

She read the description eagerly, then she said —

"I am sure Mrs. Scaiffe would like to see this house. When can we go?"

"To-day, if you like, and if you particularly wish it I can meet you at The Rosary at three o'clock."

"That will do nicely," she answered.

Soon afterwards she left me.

The rest of the morning passed as usual, and at the appointed hour I presented myself at the gates of The Rosary. A carriage was already drawn up there, and as I approached a tall lady with very dark eyes stepped out of it.

A glance showed me that the young lady had not accompanied her.

"You are Mr. Pleydell?" she said, holding out her hand to me, and speaking in excellent English

"Yes," I answered.

"You saw my step-daughter this morning?"

"Yes," I said again.

"I have called to see the house," she continued. "Muriel tells me that it is likely to suit my requirements. Will you show it to me?"

I opened the gates, and we entered a wide carriage-drive. The Rosary had been unlet for some months, and weeds partly covered the avenue. The grounds had a desolate and gloomy appearance, leaves were falling thickly from the trees, and altogether the entire place looked undesirable and neglected.

The Spanish lady, however, seemed delighted with everything. She looked around her with sparkling glances. Flashing her dark eyes into my face, she praised the trees and avenue, the house, and all that the house contained.

She remarked that the rooms were spacious, the lobbies

wide; above all things, the cellars numerous.

"I am particular about the cellars, Mr. Pleydell," she said.

"Indeed!" I answered. "At all events, there are plenty of them."

"Oh, yes! And this one is so large. It will quite suit our purpose. We will turn it into a laboratory."

"My brother and I—— Oh, I have not told you about my brother. He is a Spaniard—Señor Merello—he joins us here next week. He and I are scientists, and I hope scientists of no mean order. We have come to England for the purpose of experimenting. In this land of the free we can do what we please. We feel, Mr. Pleydell—you look so sympathizing that I cannot help confiding in you—we feel that we are on the verge of a very great—a very astounding discovery, at which the world, yes, the whole world will wonder. This house is the one of all others for our purpose. When can we take possession, Mr. Pleydell?"

I asked several questions, which were all answered to my satisfaction, and finally returned to town, prepared to draw up a lease by which the house and grounds known as The Rosary, Hampstead Heath, were to be handed over at a very high rent to Mrs. Scaiffe.



"THE SPANISH LADY SEEMED DELIGHTED WITH EVERYTHING."

I felt pleased at the good stroke of business which I had done for a client, and had no apprehensions of any sort. Little did I guess what that afternoon's work would mean to me, and still more to one whom I had ever been proud to call my greatest friend.

Everything went off without a hitch. The Rosary passed into the hands of Mrs. Scaiffe, and also into the hands of her brother, Señor Merello, a tall, dark, very handsome man, bearing all over him the well-known characteristics of a Spanish don.

A week or two went by and the affair had well-nigh passed my memory, when one afternoon I heard eager, excited words in my clerks' room, and the next moment my head clerk entered, followed by the fair-haired English-looking girl who had called herself Muriel Scaiffe.

"I want to speak to you, Mr. Pleydell," she said, in great agitation. "Can I see you alone, and at once?"

"Certainly," I answered. I motioned to the clerk to leave us and helped the young lady to a chair.

"I cannot stay a moment," she began. "Even now I am followed. Mr. Pleydell, he has told me that he knows you; it was on that account I persuaded my step-mother to come to you about a house. You are his greatest friend, for he has said it."

"Of whom are you talking?" I asked, in a bewildered tone.

"Of Oscar Digby!" she replied. "The great traveller, the great discoverer, the greatest, most single-minded, the grandest man of his age. You know him? Yes—yes."

She paused for breath. Her eyes were full of tears.

"Indeed, I do know him," I answered. "He is my very oldest friend. Where is he? What is he doing? Tell me all about him."

She had risen. Her hands were clasped tightly together, her face was white as death.

"He is on his way to England," she answered. "Even now he may have landed. He brings great news, and the moment he sets foot in London he is in danger."

"What do you mean?"

"I cannot tell you what I mean. I dare not. He is your friend, and it is your province to save him."

"But from what, Miss Scaiffe? You have no right to come here and make ambiguous statements. If you come to me at all you ought to be more explicit."

She trembled and now, as though she could not stand any longer, dropped into a chair.

"I am not brave enough to explain things more fully," she said. "I can only repeat my words, 'Your friend is in danger.' Tell him—if you can, if you will—to have nothing to do with us. Keep him, at all risks, away from us. If he mentions us pretend that you do not know anything about us. I would not speak like this if I had not cause—the gravest. When we took The Rosary I did not believe that matters were so awful; indeed, then I was unaware that Mr. Digby was returning to London. But last night I overheard . . . Oh! Mr. Pleydell, I can tell you no more. Pity me and do not question me. Keep Oscar Digby away from The Rosary and, if possible, do not betray me; but if in no other way you can insure his leaving us alone, tell him that I—yes, I, Muriel Scaiffe—wish it. There, I cannot do more."

She was trembling more terribly than ever. She took out her handkerchief to wipe the moisture from her brow.

"I must fly," she said. "If this visit is discovered my life is worth very little."

After she had gone I sat in absolute amazement. My first sensation was that the girl must be mad. Her pallor, her trembling, her vague innuendoes pointed surely to a condition of nerves the reverse of sane. But although the madness of Muriel Scaiffe seemed the most possible solution of her strange visit, I could not cast the thing from my memory. I felt almost needlessly disturbed by it. All day her extraordinary words haunted me, and when, on the next day, Digby, whom I had not seen for years, unexpectedly called, I remembered Miss Scaiffe's visit with a queer and ever-increasing sense of apprehension.

Digby had been away from London for several years. Before he went he and I had shared the same rooms, had gone about together, and had been chums in the fullest sense of the word. It was delightful to see him once again. His hearty, loud laugh fell refreshingly on my ears, and one or two glances into his face removed my fears. After all, it was impossible to associate danger with one so big, so burly, with such immense physical strength. His broad forehead, his keen, frank blue eyes, his smiling mouth, his strong and muscular hands, all denoted strength of mind and body. He looked as if he were muscle all over.

"Well," he said, "here I am, and I have a good deal to tell you. I want your help also, old man. It is your business to introduce me to the most promising and most

enterprising financier of the day. I have it in my power, Pleydell, to make his fortune, and yours, and my own, and half-a-dozen other people's as well."

"Tell me all about it," I said. I sat back in my chair, prepared to enjoy myself.

Oscar was a very noted traveller and thought much of by the Geographical Society.



"I WANT YOUR HELP ALSO, OLD MAN."

He came nearer to me and dropped his voice a trifle.

"I have made an amazing discovery," he said, "and that is one reason why I have hurried back to London. I do not know whether you are sufficiently conversant with extraordinary and out-of-the-way places on our globe. But anyhow, I may as well tell you that there is a wonderful region, as yet very little known, which lies on the watershed of the Essequibo and Amazon rivers. In that region are situated the old Montes de Cristaes or Crystal Mountains, the disputed boundary between British Guiana and Brazil. There also, according to the legend, was supposed to be the wonderful lost city of Manos. Many expeditions were sent out to discover it in the seventeenth century, and it

was the Eldorado of Sir Walter Raleigh's famous expedition in 1615, the failure of which cost him his head."

I could not help laughing.

"This sounds like an old geography lesson. What have you to do with this *terra incognita*?"

He leant forward and dropped his voice.

"Do not think me mad," he said, "for I speak in all sanity. I have found the lost Eldorado!"

"Nonsense!" I cried.

"It is true. I do not mean to say that I have found the mythical city of gold; that, of course, does not exist. But what I have discovered is a spot close to Lake Amacu that is simply laden with gold. The estimates computed on my specimens and reports make it out to be the richest place in the world. The whole thing is, as yet, a close secret, and I have come to London now to put it into the hands of a big financier. A company must be formed with a capital of something like ten millions to work it."

"By Jove!" I cried. "You astonish me."

"The thing will create an enormous sensation," he went on, "and I shall be a millionaire; that is, if the secret does not leak out."

"The secret," I cried.

"Yes, the secret of its exact locality."

"Have you charts?"

"Yes; but those I would rather not disclose, even to you, old man, just yet."

I was silent for a moment, then I said—

"Horace Lancaster is the biggest financier in the whole of London. He is undoubtedly your man. If you can satisfy him with your reports, charts, and specimens he can float the company. You must see him, Digby."

"Yes, that is what I want," he cried.

"I will telephone to his office at once."

I rang the bell for my clerk and gave him directions.

He left the room. In a few moments he returned with the information that Lancaster was in Paris.

"He won't be back for a week, sir," said the clerk.

He left the room, and I looked at Digby.

"Are you prepared to wait?" I asked.

He shrugged his great shoulders.

"I must, I suppose," he said. "But it is provoking. At any moment another may forestall me. Not that it is likely; but there is always the possibility. Shall we talk over matters to-night, Pleydell? Will you dine with me at my club?"

"With a heart and a half," I answered.

"By the way," continued Digby, "some friends of mine—Brazilians—ought to be in London now; a lady of the name of Scaiffe, with her pretty little step-daughter, an English girl. I should like to introduce you to them. They are remarkably nice people. I had a letter from Mrs. Scaiffe just as I was leaving Brazil telling me that they were *en route* for England and asking me to look her up in town. I wonder where they are? Her brother, too, Señor Merello, is a most charming man. Why, Pleydell, what is the matter?"

I was silent for a moment; then I said: "If I were you I would have nothing to do with these people. I happen to know their whereabouts, and——"

"Well?" he said, opening his eyes in amazement.

"The little girl does not want you to call on them, Digby. Take her advice. She looked true and good." To my astonishment I saw that the big fellow seemed quite upset at my remarks.

"True!" he said, beginning to pace the room. "Of course the little thing is true. I tell you, Pleydell, I am fond of her. Not engaged, or anything of that sort, but I like her. I was looking forward to meeting them. The mother—the step-mother, I mean—is a magnificent woman. I am great friends with her. I was staying at their Quinta last winter. I also know the brother, Señor Merello. Has little Muriel lost her head?"

"She is anxious and frightened. The whole thing seems absurd, of course, but she certainly did beg of me to keep you away from her step-mother, and I half promised to respect her secret and not to tell you the name of the locality where Mrs. Scaiffe and Señor Merello are at present living."

He tried not to look annoyed, but he evidently was so. A few moments later he left me.

That evening Digby and I dined together. We afterwards went exhaustively into the great subject of his discovery. He showed me his specimens and reports, and, in short, so completely fired my enthusiasm that I was all impatience for Lancaster's return. The thing was a big thing, one worth fighting for. We said no more about Mrs. Scaiffe, and I hoped that my friend would not fall into the hands of a woman who, I began to fear, was little better than an adventuress.

Three or four days passed. Lancaster was still detained in Paris, and Digby was evidently eating his heart out with impatience at the unavoidable delay in getting his great scheme floated.

One afternoon he burst noisily into my presence.

"Well," he cried. "The little girl has discovered herself. Talk of women and their pranks! She came to see me at my hotel. She declared that she could not keep away. I just took the little thing in my arms and hugged her. We are going to have a honeymoon when the company is floated, and this evening, Pleydell, I dine at The Rosary.



"I JUST TOOK THE LITTLE THING IN MY ARMS AND HUGGED HER."

Ha! ha! my friend. I know all about the secret retreat of the Scaiffes by this time. Little Muriel told me herself. I dine there to-night, and they want you to come, too."

I was about to refuse when, as if in a vision, the strange, entreating, suffering face of Muriel Scaiffe, as I had seen it the day she implored me to save my friend, rose up before my eyes. Whatever her present inexplicable conduct might mean, I would go with Digby to-night.

We arrived at The Rosary between seven and eight o'clock. Mrs. Scaiffe received us in Oriental splendour. Her dress was a wonder of magnificence. Diamonds flashed in her raven black hair and glittered round her shapely neck. She was certainly one of the most splendid-looking women I had ever seen, and Digby was not many moments in her company before he was completely subjugated by her charms.

The pale little Muriel looked washed-out and insignificant beside this gorgeous creature. Señor Merello was a masculine edition of his handsome sister: his presence and his wonderful courtly grace of manner seemed but to enhance and accentuate her charms.

At dinner we were served by Spanish servants, and a repulsive-looking negro of the name of Samson stood behind Mrs. Scaiffe's chair.

She was in high spirits, drank freely of champagne, and openly alluded to the great discovery.

"You must show us the chart, my friend," she said.

"No!" he answered, in an emphatic voice. He smiled as he spoke and showed his strong, white teeth.

She bent towards him and whispered something. He glanced at Muriel, whose face was deadly white. Then he rose abruptly.

"As regards anything else, command me," he said; "but not the chart."

Mrs. Scaiffe did not press him further. The ladies went into the drawing-room, and by-and-by Digby and I found ourselves returning to London.

During the journey I mentioned to him that Lancaster had wired to say that he would be at his office and prepared for a meeting on Friday. This was Monday night.

"I am glad to hear that the thing will not be delayed much longer," he answered. "I may as well confess that I am devoured by impatience."

"Your mind will soon be at rest," I replied. "And now, one thing more, old

man. I must talk frankly. I do not like Mrs. Scaiffe—I do not like Señor Merello. As you value all your future, keep that chart out of the hands of those people."

"Am I mad?" he questioned. "The chart is seen by no living soul until I place it in Lancaster's hands. But all the same. Pleydell," he added, "you are prejudiced, Mrs. Scaiffe is one of the best of women."

"Think her so, if you will," I replied; "but, whatever you do, keep your knowledge of your Eldorado to yourself. Remember that on Friday the whole thing will be safe in Lancaster's keeping."

He promised, and I left him.

On Tuesday I saw nothing of Digby.

On Wednesday evening, when I returned home late, I received the following letter:—

I am not mad. I have heavily bribed the kitchen-maid, the only English woman in the whole house, to post this for me. I was forced to call on Mr. Digby and to engage myself to him at any cost. I am now strictly confined to my room under pretence of illness. In reality I am quite well, but a close prisoner. Mr. Digby dined here again last night and, under the influence of a certain drug introduced into his wine, has given away the whole of his discovery *except* the exact locality.

He is to take supper here late to-morrow night (Thursday) and to bring the chart. If he does, he will never leave The Rosary alive. All is prepared. *I speak who know.* Don't betray me, but save him.

The letter fell from my hands. What did it mean? Was Digby's life in danger, or had the girl who wrote to me really gone mad? The letter was without date, without any heading, and without signature. Nevertheless, as I picked it up and read it carefully over again, I was absolutely convinced beyond a shadow of doubt of its truth. Muriel Scaiffe was not mad. She was a victim, to how great an extent I did not dare to think. Another victim, one in even greater danger, was Oscar Digby. I must save him. I must do what the unhappy girl who was a prisoner in that awful house implored of me.

It was late, nearly midnight, but I knew that I had not a moment to lose. I had a friend, a certain Dr. Garland, who had been police surgeon for the Westminster Division for several years. I went immediately to his house in Eaton Square. As I had expected, he was up, and without any preamble I told him the whole long story of the last few weeks.

Finally, I showed him the letter. He heard me without once interrupting. He read the letter without comment. When he folded it up and returned it to me I saw that his keen, clean-shaven face was full of interest. He was silent for several minutes, then he said:—

"I am glad you came to me. This story of yours may mean a very big thing. We have four *prima-facie* points. *One*: Your friend has this enormously valuable secret about the place in Guiana or on its boundary; a secret which may be worth anything. *Two*: He is very intimate with Mrs. Scaiffe, her step-daughter, and her brother. The intimacy started in Brazil. *Three*: He is engaged to the step-daughter, who evidently is being used as a sort of tool, and is herself in a state of absolute terror, and, so far as one can make out, is not specially in love with Digby nor Digby with her. *Four*: Mrs. Scaiffe and her brother are determined, at any risk, to secure the chart which Digby is to hand to them to-morrow evening. The girl thinks this so important that she has practically risked her life to give you due warning. By the way, when did you say Lancaster would return? Has he made an appointment to see Digby and yourself?"

"Yes; at eleven o'clock on Friday morning."

"Doubtless Mrs. Scaiffe and her brother know of this."

"Probably," I answered. "As far as I can make out they have such power over Digby that he confides everything to them."

"Just so. They have power over him, and they are not scrupulous as to the means they use to force his confidence. If Digby goes to The Rosary to-morrow

evening the interview with Lancaster will, in all probability, never take place."

"What do you mean?" I cried, in horror.

"Why, this. Mrs. Scaiffe and Señor Merello are determined to learn Digby's secret. It is necessary for their purpose that they should know the secret and also that they should be the *sole possessors* of it. You see why they want Digby to call on them? They must get his secret from him *before* he sees Lancaster. The chances are that if he gives it up he will never leave the house alive."

"Then, what are we to do?" I asked, for

Garland's meaning stunned me, and I felt incapable of thought or of any mode of action.

"Leave this matter in my hands. I am going immediately to see Inspector Frost. I will communicate with you directly anything serious occurs."

The next morning I called upon Digby and found him breakfasting at his club. He looked worried, and, when I came in, his greeting was scarcely cordial.

"What a solemn face, Pleydell!" he said. "Is anything wrong?" He motioned me to a seat near. I sank into it.

"I want you to come out of town with me," I said. "I can take a day off. Shall we both run down to Brighton? We can return in time for our interview with Lancaster to-morrow."

"It is impossible," he answered. "I should like to come with you, but I have an engagement for to-night."

"Are you going to The Rosary?" I asked.



"THEY HAVE SUCH POWER OVER DIGBY THAT HE CONFIDES EVERYTHING TO THEM."

"I am," he replied, after a moment's pause. "Why, what is the matter?" he added. "I suppose I may consider myself a free agent." There was marked irritation in his tone.

"I wish you would not go," I said.

"Why not?"

"I do not trust the people."

"Folly, Pleydell. In the old days you used not to be so prejudiced."

"I had not the same cause. Digby, if ever people are trying to get you into their hands, they are those people. Have you not already imparted your secret to them?"

"How do you know?" he exclaimed, springing up and turning crimson.

"Well, can you deny it?"

His face paled.

"I don't know that I want to," he said.

"Mrs. Scaiffe and Merello will join me in this matter. There is no reason why things should be kept dark from them."

"But is this fair or honourable to Lancaster? Remember, I have already written fully to him. Do, I beg of you, be careful."

"Lancaster cannot object to possible wealthy shareholders," was Digby's answer.

"Anyhow," he added, laughing uneasily, "I object to being interfered with. Pray understand that, old man, if we are to continue friends; and now by-bye for the present. We meet at eleven o'clock to-morrow at Lancaster's."

His manner gave me no pretext for remaining longer with him, and I returned to my own work. About five o'clock on that same day a telegram was handed to me which ran as follows:—

Come here at once.—GARLAND.

I left the house, hailed a hansom, and in a quarter of an hour was shown into Garland's study. He was not alone. A rather tall, grey-haired, grey-moustached, middle-aged man was with him. This man was introduced to me as Inspector Frost.

"Now, Pleydell," said Garland, in his quick, incisive way, "listen to me carefully. The time is short. Inspector Frost and I have not ceased our inquiries since you called on me last night. I must tell you that we believe the affair to be of the most serious kind. Time is too pressing now to enter into all details, but the thing amounts to this. There is the gravest suspicion that Mrs. Scaiffe and her brother, Señor Merello, are employed by a notorious gang in Brazil to force Digby to disclose the exact position of the gold mine. We also know for certain that Mrs. Scaiffe is in constant and close communication with some very suspicious people both in London and in Brazil.

"Now, listen. The crisis is to be to-night. Digby is to take supper at The Rosary, and there to give himself absolutely away. He will take his chart with him; that is the scheme. Digby must not go—that is, if we can possibly prevent him. We expect you to do what you can under the circumstances, but as the case is so serious, and as it is more than probable that Digby will not be persuaded, Inspector Frost and myself and a number of men of his division will surround the house as soon as it becomes dark,

and if Digby should insist on going in every protection in case of difficulty will be given him. The presence of the police will also insure the capture of Mrs. Scaiffe and her brother."

"You mean," I said, "that you will, if necessary, search the house?"

"Yes."

"But how can you do so without a warrant?"

"We have thought of that," said Garland, with a smile. "A magistrate living at Hampstead has been already communicated with. If necessary, one of our men will ride over to his house and procure the requisite instrument to enforce our entrance."

"Very well," I answered; "then I will go at once to Digby's, but I may as well tell you plainly that I have very little hope of dissuading him."

I drove as fast as I could to my friend's rooms, but was greeted with the information that he had already left and was not expected back until late that evening. This was an unlooked-for blow.

I went to his club—he was not there. I then returned to Dr. Garland.

"I failed to find him," I said. "What can be done? Is it possible that he has already gone to his fate?"

"That is scarcely likely," replied Garland, after a pause. "He was invited to supper at The Rosary, and according to your poor young friend's letter the time named was late. There is nothing for it but to waylay him on the grounds before he goes in. You will come with us to-night, will you not, Pleydell?"

"Certainly," I answered.

Garland and I dined together. At half-past nine we left Eaton Square and, punctually at ten o'clock, the hansom we had taken put us down at one of the roads on the north side of the Heath. The large house which I knew so well loomed black in the moonlight.

The night was cold and fresh. The moon was in its second quarter and was shining brightly. Garland and I passed down the dimly-lit lane beside the wall. A tall, dark figure loomed from the darkness and, as it came forward, I saw that it was Inspector Frost.

"Mr. Digby has not arrived yet," he said. "Perhaps, sir," he added, looking at me, "you can even now dissuade him, for it is a bad business. All my men are ready," he continued, "and at a signal the house will be surrounded; but we must have one last try to prevent his entering it. Come this way,

please, sir," he added, beckoning to me to follow him.

We passed out into the road.

"I am absolutely bewildered, inspector," I said to him. "Do you mean to say there is really great danger?"

"The worst I ever knew," was his answer. "You cannot stop a man entering a house if he wishes to; but I can tell you, Mr. Pleydell, I do not believe his life is worth that if he goes in." And the inspector snapped his fingers.

He had scarcely ceased speaking when the jingling of the bells of a hansom sounded behind us. The cab drew up at the gates and Oscar Digby alighted close to us.

Inspector Frost touched him on the shoulder.

He swung round and recognised me.

"Halloa! Pleydell," he said, in no very cordial accents. "What in the name of Heaven are you doing here? What does this mean? Who is this man?"

"I am a police-officer, Mr. Digby, and I want to speak to you. Mr. Pleydell has asked you not to go into that house. You are, of course, free to do as you like, but I must tell you that you are running into great danger. Be advised by me and go away."

For answer Digby thrust his hand into his breast-pocket. He

pulled out a note which he gave me.

"Read that, Pleydell," he said; "and receive my answer." I tore the letter from its envelope and read in the moonlight:

Come to me. I am in danger and suffering. Do not fail me.—MURIEL.

"A hoax! A forgery!" I could not help crying. "For God's sake, Digby, don't be mad."

"Mad or sane, I go into that house," he said. His bright blue eyes flashed with passion and his breath came quickly.

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"Hands off, sir, Don't keep me."

He swung himself away from me.

"One word," called the inspector after him. "How long do you expect to remain?"

"Perhaps an hour. I shall be home by midnight."

"And now, sir, please listen. You can be assured, in case of any trouble, that we are here, and I may further tell you that if you are not out of the house by one o'clock, we shall enter with a search warrant."

Digby stood still for a moment, then he turned to me.

"I cannot but resent your interference, but I believe you mean well. Good bye!" He



wrung my hand and walked quickly up the drive.

We watched him ring the bell. The door was opened at once by the negro servant. Digby entered. The door closed silently. Inspector Frost gave a low whistle.

"I would not be that man for a good deal," he said.

Garland came up to us both.

"Is the house entirely surrounded, Frost?" I heard him whisper. Frost smiled, and I

saw his white teeth gleam in the darkness. He waved his hand.

"There is not a space of six feet between man and man," I heard him say; "and now we have nothing to do but to wait and hope for at least an hour and a half. If in an hour's time Mr. Digby does not reappear I shall send a man for the warrant. At one o'clock we enter the house."

Garland and I stood beneath a large fir tree in a dense shade and within the inclosed garden. The minutes seemed to crawl. Our conversation was limited to low whispers at long intervals.

Eleven o'clock chimed on the church clock near by; then half-past sounded on the night air. My ears were strained to catch the expected click of the front door latch, but it did not come. The house remained wrapt in silence. Once Garland whispered:—

"Hark!" We listened closely. It certainly seemed to me that a dull, muffled sound, as of pounding or hammering, was just audible; but whether it came from the house or not it was impossible to tell.

At a quarter to twelve the one remaining lighted window on the first floor became suddenly dark. Still there was no sign of Digby. Midnight chimed.

Frost said a word to Garland and disappeared, treading softly. He was absent for more than half an hour. When he returned I heard him say:—

"I have got it," and he touched his pocket with his hand as he spoke.

The remaining moments went by in intense anxiety, and, just as the deep boom of one o'clock was heard the inspector laid his hand on my shoulder.

"Come along quietly," he whispered.

Some sign, conveyed by a low whistle, passed from him to his men, and I heard the bushes rustle around us.

The next moment we had ascended the steps, and we could hear the deep whirr of the front door bell as Frost pressed the button.

In less time than we had expected we heard the bolts shot back. The door was

opened on a chain and a black face appeared at the slit.

"Who are you and what do you want?" said a voice.

"I have called for Mr. Digby," said Frost. "Go and tell him that his friend, Mr. Pleydell, and also Doctor Garland want to see him immediately."

A look of blank surprise came over the negro's face.

"But no one of the name of Digby lives here," he said.

"Mrs. Scaffe lives here," replied the inspector, "and also a Spanish gentleman of the name of Señor Merello. Tell them that I wish to see them immediately, and that I am a police-officer."

A short conversation was evidently taking place within. The next moment the door was flung open, electric lights sprang into being, and my eyes fell upon Mrs. Scaffe.

She was dressed with her usual magnificence. She came forward with a stately calm and stood silently before us. Her large black eyes were gleaming.

"Well, Mr. Pleydell," she said, speaking in



THE LADY FRODO WITH A SEA-ROCK LAMP

an easy voice, "what is the reason of this midnight disturbance? I am always glad to welcome you to my house, but is not the hour a little late?"

Her words were interrupted by Inspector Frost, who held up his hand.

"Your attitude, madam," he said, "is hopeless. We have all come here with a definite object. Mr. Oscar Digby entered this house at a quarter past ten to-night. From that moment the house has been closely surrounded. He is therefore still here."

"Where is your authority for this unwarrantable intrusion?" she said. Her manner changed, her face grew hard as iron. Her whole attitude was one of insolence and defiance.

The inspector immediately produced his warrant.

She glanced over it and uttered a shrill laugh.

"Mr. Digby is not in the house," she said.

She had scarcely spoken before an adjoining door was opened, and Señor Merello, looking gaunt and very white about the face, approached. She looked up at him and smiled, then she said, carelessly:—

"Gentlemen, this is my brother, Señor Merello."

The Señor bowed slightly, but did not speak.

"Once more," said Frost, "where is Mr. Digby?"

"I repeat once more," said Mrs. Scaiffe, "that Mr. Digby is not in this house."

"But we saw him enter at a quarter past ten."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"He is not here now."

"He could not have gone, for the house has been surrounded."

Again she gave her shoulders a shrug.

"You have your warrant, gentlemen," she said; "you can look for yourselves."

Frost came up to her.

"I regret to say, madam, that you, this gentleman, and all your servants must consider yourselves under arrest until we find Mr. Oscar Digby."

"That will be for ever, then," she replied; "but please yourselves."

My heart beat with an unwonted sense of terror. What could the woman mean? Digby, either dead or alive, must be in the house.

The operations which followed were conducted rapidly. The establishment, consisting of Mrs. Scaiffe, her brother, two Spanish men-servants, two maids, one of Spanish

extraction, and the negro who had opened the door to us, were summoned and placed in the charge of a police-sergeant.

Muriel Scaiffe was nowhere to be seen.

Then our search of the house began. The rooms on the ground floor, consisting of the drawing-room, dining-room, and two other big rooms, were fitted up in quite an everyday manner. We did not take much time going through them.

In the basement, the large cellar which had attracted Mrs. Scaiffe's pleased surprise on the day when I took her to see The Rosary had now been fitted up as a laboratory. I gazed at it in astonishment. It was evidently intended for the manufacture of chemicals on an almost commercial scale. All the latest chemical and electrical apparatus were to be found there, as well as several large machines, the purposes of which were not evident. One in particular I specially noticed. It was a big tank with a complicated equipment for the manufacture of liquid air in large quantities.

We had no time to give many thoughts to the laboratory just then. A foreboding sense of ever-increasing fear was upon each and all of us. It was sufficient to see that Digby was not there.

Our search in the upper regions was equally unsuccessful. We were just going down stairs again when Frost drew my attention to a door which we had not yet opened. We went to it and found it locked. Putting our strength to work, Garland and I between us burst it open. Within, we found a girl crouching by the bed. She was only partly dressed, and her head was buried in her hands. We went up to her. She turned, saw my face, and suddenly clung to me.

"Have you found him? Is he safe?"

"I do not know, my dear," I answered, trying to soothe her. "We are looking for him. God grant us success."

"Did he come to the house? I have been locked in here all day and heavily drugged. I have only just recovered consciousness and scarcely know what I am doing. Is he in the house?"

"He came in. We are searching for him; we hope to find him."

"That you will never do!" She gave a piercing cry and fell unconscious on the floor.

We placed the unhappy girl on the bed. Garland produced brandy and gave her a few drops; she came to in a couple of minutes and began to moan feebly. We left her,



promising to return. We had no time to attend to her just then.

When we reached the hall Frost stood still.

"The man is not here," he muttered.

"But he is here," was Garland's incisive answer. "Inspector, you have got to tear the place to pieces."

The latter nodded.

The inspector's orders were given rapidly, and dawn was just breaking when ten policemen, ordered in from outside, began their systematic search of the entire house from roof to basement.

Pick and crowbar were ruthlessly applied, and never have I seen a house in such a mess. Floorings were torn up and rafters cut through. Broken plaster littered the rooms and lay about on the sumptuous furniture. Walls were pierced and bored through. Closets and cupboards were ransacked. The backs of the fireplaces were torn out and the chimneys explored.

Very little was said as our investigation proceeded, and room after room was checked off.

Finally, an exhaustive examination of the basement and cellars completed our search.

"Well, Dr. Garland, are you satisfied?" asked the inspector.

We had gone back to the garden, and Garland was leaning against a tree, his hands thrust in his pockets and his eyes fixed on the ground. Frost pulled his long moustache and breathed quickly.

"Are you satisfied?" he repeated.

"We must talk sense or we shall all go mad," was Garland's answer. "The thing is absurd, you know. Men don't disappear. Let us work this thing out logically. There are only three planes in space and we know matter is indestructible. If Digby left this house he went up, down, or horizontally. *Up is out of the question*. If he disappeared in a balloon or was shot off the roof he

must have been seen by us, for the house was surrounded. He certainly did not pass through the cordon of men. *He did not go down*, for every cubic foot of basement and cellar has been accounted for, as well as every cubic foot of space in the house.

"So we come to the chemical change of matter, dissipation into gas by heat. There are no furnaces, no ashes, no gas cylinders, nor dynamos, nor carbon points. The time when we lost sight of him to the time of entrance was exactly two hours and three-quarters. There is no way out of it. He is still there."

"He is not there," was the quiet retort of the inspector. "I have sent for the Assistant Commissioner to Scotland Yard, and will ask him to take over the case. It is too much for me."

The tension in all our minds had now reached such a state of strain that we began to fear our own shadows.

Oscar Digby, standing, as it were, on the threshold of a very great future, the hero of a legend worthy of old romance, had suddenly and inexplicably vanished. I could not get my reason to believe that he was not still in the house, for there was not the least doubt that he had not come out. What would happen in the next few hours?

"Is there no secret chamber or secret passage that we have overlooked?" I said, turning to the inspector.

"The walls have been tapped," he replied. "There is not the slightest indication of a

hollow. There are no underground passages. The man is not within these walls."

He now spoke with a certain degree of irritation in his voice which the mystery of the case had evidently awakened in his mind. A few moments later the sound of approaching wheels caused us to turn our heads. A cab drew up at the gates, out of which alighted the well-known form of Sir George Freer.

Garland had already entered the house, and on Sir George appearing on the scene he and I followed him.

We had just advanced across the hall to the room where the members of the household, with the exception of poor Muriel Scaiffe, were still detained, when, to our utter amazement, a long, strange peal of laughter sounded from below. This was followed by another, and again by another. The laughter came from the lips of Garland. We glanced at each other. What on earth did it mean? Together we darted down the stone steps, but before we reached the laboratory another laugh rang out. All hope in me was suddenly changed to a chilling fear, for the laugh was not natural. It had a clanging, metallic sound, without any mirth.

In the centre of the room stood Garland. His mouth was twitching and his breath jerked in and out convulsively.

"What is it? What is the matter?" I cried.

He made no reply, but, pointing to a machine with steel blocks, once more broke into a choking, gurgling laugh which made my flesh creep.

Had he gone mad? Sir George moved swiftly across to him and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Come, what is all this, Garland?" he said, sternly, though his own face was full of fear.

I knew Garland to be a man of extraordinary self-control, and I could see that he was now holding himself in with all the force at his command.

"It is no use—I cannot tell you," he burst out.

"What—you know what has become of him?"

"Yes."

"You can prove it?"

"Yes."

"Speak out, man."

"He is not here," said Garland.

"Then where is he?"

He flung his hand out towards the Heath, and I saw that the fit was taking him again, but once more he controlled himself. Then he said, in a clear, level voice:—

"He is dead, Sir George, and you can never see his body. You cannot hold an inquest, for there is nothing to hold it on. The winds have taken him and scattered him in dust on the Heath. Don't look at me like



"IN THE CENTRE OF THE ROOM STOOD GARLAND."

that, Pleydell. I am sane, although it is a wonder we are not all mad over this business. Look and listen."

He pointed to the great metal tank.

"I arrived at my present conclusion by a

process of elimination," he began. "Into that tank which contained liquid air Digby, gagged and bound, must have been placed violently, probably after he had given away the chart. Death would have been instantaneous, and he would have been frozen into complete solidity in something like forty minutes. The ordinary laboratory experiment is to freeze a rabbit, which can then be powdered into mortar like any other friable stone. The operation here has been the same. It is only a question of size. Remember, we are dealing with 312deg. below zero Fahrenheit, and then—well, look at this and these."

He pointed to a large machine with steel blocks and to a bench littered with saws, chisels, pestles, and mortars.

"That machine is a stone-breaker," he said. "On the dust adhering to these blocks I found this."

He held up a test tube containing a blue liquid.

"The Guaiacum test," he said. "In other words, blood. This fact taken with the facts we already know, that Digby never left the house; that the only other agent of destruction of a body, fire, is out of the question; that this tank is the receptacle of that enormous machine for making liquid air in very large quantities; and, above all, the practical possibility of the operation being conducted by the men who are at present in the house, afford me absolutely conclusive proof beyond a possibility of doubt as to what has happened. The body of that unfortunate man is as if it had never been, without a fragment of pin-point size for identification or evidence. It is beyond the annals of all the crimes that I have ever heard of. What law can help us? Can you hold an inquest on nothing? Can you charge a person with murder where no victim or trace of a victim can be produced?"

A sickly feeling came over me. Garland's words carried their own conviction, and we knew that we stood in the presence of a horror without a name. Nevertheless, to the police mind horror *per se* does not exist.

To them there is always a mystery, a crime, and a solution. That is all. The men beside me were police once more. Sentiment might come later.

"Are there any reporters here?" asked Sir George.

"None," answered Frost.

"Good. Mr. Oscar Digby has disappeared. There is no doubt how. There can, of course, be no arrest, as Dr. Garland has just said. Our official position is this. We suspect that Mr. Digby has been murdered, but the search for the discovery of the body has failed. That is our position."

Before I left that awful house I made arrangements to have Muriel Scaiffe conveyed to a London hospital. I did not consult Mrs. Scaiffe on the subject. I could not get myself to say another word to the woman. In the hospital a private ward was secured for the unhappy girl, and there for many weeks she hovered between life and death.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Scaiffe and her brother were detained at The Rosary. They were closely watched by the police, and although they made many efforts to escape they found it impossible. Our hope was that when Muriel recovered strength she would be able to substantiate a case against them. But, alas! this hope was unfounded, for, as the girl recovered, there remained a blank in her memory which no efforts on our part could fill. She had absolutely and completely forgotten Oscar Digby, and the house on Hampstead Heath was to her as though it had never existed. In all other respects she was well. Under these circumstances we were forced to allow the Spaniard and his sister to return to their own country, our one most earnest hope being that we might never see or hear of them again.

Meanwhile, Muriel grew better. I was interested in her from the first. When she was well enough I placed her with some friends of my own. A year ago she became my wife. I think she is happy. A past which is forgotten cannot trouble her. I have long ago come to regard her as the best and truest woman living.

Eyes of Terror.

By L. T. MEADE.



THE strange story which I am about to tell happened just when the late war in South Africa was at its height. I was in a very nervous condition at the time, having lost my dear father, who was killed in action shortly before the taking of Pretoria. The news of my father's death reached us on a certain evening in May, just when the days were approaching their longest, and summer, with all its beauties, was about to visit the land. It was immediately afterwards that the visitations which I am about to describe took place. They were of a very alarming character, and so much did they upset my mental equilibrium that I determined to put my case into the hands of a certain Professor Ellicott, who was not only a physician and surgeon in the ordinary sense, but was also a man of great learning and keen original research.

I had met the Professor once at the house of a neighbour, and on that occasion had admired him, not only for his intellectual appearance, but also for the massive strength of his face and the calmness of his bearing. I knew that a strong man, who was also sympathetic and tactful, would not laugh at a girl's fears, however unreasonable he might consider them, and had not the least doubt that I should receive a patient hearing when I told him my story.

My name is Nora Dallas. I am twenty-one years of age. I have lived all my life in a beautiful old place about a mile and a half from the town of Ashingford. Professor Ellicott lived in the High Street, and I was fortunate enough to find him at home.

I sent in my card and was immediately admitted into his presence. He was a man of about thirty, with resolute grey eyes and a determined chin. He gave me a quick glance when I entered the room; then, without uttering a word, pointed to a chair.

"I am called Nora Dallas," I said.

"I know," he replied, in a gentle voice. "You are the daughter of that Colonel Dallas whose gallant action, when he sacrificed his life for his country on the march to Pretoria, is the talk and admiration of the country."

My eyes filled with tears.

"It is only three weeks since I heard of my father's death," I said. "You will forgive me, sir, but I cannot bear any sympathetic reference to the subject, at least for the present."

"I understand," he replied, his hard face softening. "And now, what can I do for you?"

"I want to consult you as a doctor."

"But I am not a consultant—I mean that I do not practise medicine in the ordinary sense."

"I am aware of that fact," I answered. "And just for that very reason, Professor Ellicott, I have been compelled to come to you."

"I do not quite understand."

He looked at me with the dawn of a smile on his lips.

"I think you will give me a frank opinion, and be unbiased by the red-tapism which causes many medical men to hide the truth from their patients."

"Ah, you think well of me," he said, with a smile, "and I perceive that you are a brave woman. Nevertheless, I must inform you that I am scarcely qualified to enter into your case. My work lies altogether in the regions of original research."

"May I at least tell you my story?" I insisted. "You can make up your mind afterwards whether you will help me or not."

His reply to this was to get up and pace the room, stopping once or twice to look at me, then continuing his slow, measured tread up and down. I did not interrupt him. I sat as still as though carved in marble.

"You must forgive my apparent rudeness, Miss Dallas," he said, "but I was endeavouring to recall what I had already heard about you. I remember everything now. I met you a month ago at Sir John Newcome's. You live at Courtlands, one of the finest places in the neighbourhood. You are an only child. Doubtless, now that your father is dead, you are wealthy. You have lived at Courtlands almost all your life. Of course, Miss Dallas, you have your own family physician?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Will you not consult him?"

"No; for he is not the man for my purpose."

He smiled.

"You think that I am?"

"If anyone can help me, you can."

"How like a woman!" he said, somewhat impatiently. "And yet you know nothing about me. As I said just now, I am not a consultant. I have come to Ashingford for quiet, and for the opportunity to examine into the length and breadth of a problem which, if I can bring it to a successful issue, will mean health and happiness to millions. And yet a girl, little more than a child, wants to interrupt my train of thought. Do you think you are fair to me?"

"I don't know anything about that," I replied, with vehemence. "I only know that I want help. Will you give it to me?"

My voice broke.

"Of course I will," he said, cordially, and his whole manner completely altered. "I only said what I did to test you. Now we will pre-ambulate no more. Tell me your story."

"I was twenty-one last March," I began, immediately, "and now that my dear father is dead am absolutely my own mistress. With the exception of my Aunt Sophia, my father's sister, who lives with me, and my two cousins, I am without relations. It is about these cousins that I wish specially to speak. They are the sons of my father's younger brother, who has long been dead. My father adopted them in their infancy, brought them up, sent them to school, and gave them all they required. They are twins and are now five-and-twenty years of age. Rudolf has been called to the Bar and Lionel is a solicitor. Professor Ellicott, I must be truthful—I must be truthful even at the risk of failing in charity. My cousins are not good men. I have nothing absolutely to say against them—I have no means at present of proving my words—nevertheless, instinct tells me that I am right. Rudolf is the sort of man who imposes on people. I have seen him rhapsodize over poetry or a sunset, and his friends

then imagine that he has a great love for the beautiful. But I know better. The only love in his wicked heart is the love of money. Lionel is his weak shadow—his dupe and tool."

"Surely you are hard on your cousins?"

"You would naturally think so; and yet I hope to convince you that I have read their characters aright."

"My father, before he went to South Africa, made a will, the contents of which he fully explained to me. In the event



"I ONLY KNOW THAT I WANT HELP."

of his death I was to inherit the house and estate and also the bulk of his money, with the exception of a sum of sixty thousand pounds, which was to be divided between my two cousins. He fully explained all that he wanted to tell me with regard to his last will, and gave me directions as to certain affairs which he wished to be specially attended to. My dear father then continued to say some words which astonished and distressed me very much. He declared that it was the darling wish of his heart that Rudolf and I should marry. My father said that he had the highest opinion of my cousin,

and assured me that nothing would make him happier than such a marriage. Rudolf had told him of his attachment to me—an attachment which I knew well did not exist.

"I heard my father in silence. Then I gave an emphatic negative to the whole proposal. My father listened in amazement. I said that I neither liked nor trusted my cousin, and that nothing—no words, no conditions—would make me accept him. After a pause my father said that my feelings must be my guide, but he continued:—

"‘I cannot agree with your opinion, and I sincerely hope that time may alter it.’

"From the hour of his departure there began for me a detestable period, during which I was persecuted by Rudolf's odious attentions. As he and Lionel practically lived in our house, you can imagine that it was impossible for me to escape altogether from his presence. But at last it became so intolerable that I wrote to my father on the subject. I told Rudolf quite frankly that I was doing so, and even made him acquainted with the greater part of my letter. In that letter I told my father that he did not rightly gauge his nephew's character, that he was not what he believed him to be, and, in order to prove my words, I mentioned a few instances which, unconvincing to a stranger like yourself, might have the effect of opening his eyes.

"That letter was posted two months ago. Up to the present I have had no reply to it, but am even now waiting and hoping to hear my father's views on the subject. Important letters must be on the road from South Africa for me. I have only received the news of my dear father's death by cablegram."

My voice broke. I paused, struggling with emotion; then I continued:—

"I am sorry to trouble you, Professor Ellicott, with this long preamble. I am now approaching that strange thing about which I wish to consult you.

"We received the cablegram acquainting us with the news of my father's death on a certain morning towards the end of last month. On the evening of that same day another long cablegram from South Africa was put into Rudolf's hands. He was sitting with my aunt and me in the drawing room when he received it. He opened it, was evidently very much upset, but refused to divulge its contents. He called Lionel to his side, and they left the room together. I saw them pacing up and down in the shrubbery,

evidently consulting with regard to the contents of the cablegram, but never from that hour till now have I heard the slightest inkling of what it was about.

"Three days later my father's will was read and my cousins heard of the large sums of money which would fall to their share. They fully expected to be remembered in my father's will, but not to such a generous extent, and their satisfaction was very great. As to Rudolf, his face quite beamed with delight, and they were both in feverish haste to possess themselves of the money. Mr. Brewster, our family lawyer, however, said that it would be impossible for them to receive their legacies for several weeks, as probate would have to be taken and other preliminaries attended to. Finally he made the remark:—

"‘Nothing can really be done until Colonel Dallas's letters and papers arrive from South Africa. This can scarcely be expected until a month from the present date.’

"On that very evening my elder cousin came to me again and once more implored me to become his wife. He spoke of my father and his well-known wishes on the subject, and pleaded with such power that had I not known him well I might have been touched into a semblance of kindness by his manner. I did know my cousin, however, and told him so in unmistakable terms. He seemed to struggle with emotion for a minute; then he said, rising as he spoke:—

"‘All right, Nora, I see I must accept your verdict. You may be sure that I will not trouble you on this subject again. It would be brutal to do so,’ he added, ‘for you are looking very ill. I see it in your eyes.’

"‘I am not exactly ill,’ I answered. ‘I am naturally in very great trouble, but I am no more really ill than you are.’

"‘I am all right,’ he said, with a shrug of his shoulders. ‘But your nerves, poor Nora, are in a sad condition. You have received a most serious shock, and it is telling on you. You ought to be exceedingly careful. I mean it is your duty to be much more careful than most women.’

"‘I don't understand you,’ I answered. ‘And I wish,’ I added, ‘that you would leave me now.’

"‘I will in a minute,’ he said, and then he approached quite close to my side.

"‘One word before I go,’ he went on, and he fixed his great, strong, dark eyes on mine. ‘Whether you like me or whether you hate me we are cousins, Nora. Our family history is well known to each of us. I in particular,

however, have studied medicine, and am therefore in a position to speak. I only gave up medicine for the Bar because I thought I saw a more speedy way of earning money in that profession. Now, Nora, listen. Raise your eyes to mine. Don't shrink, child. If you encourage the morbid fancies which are now filling your brain you will share the fate of poor Aunt Ethel. I know what I am talking about. The pupils of your eyes point to a disordered brain.'

"He left me. I sat still for a minute, feeling more nervous and disturbed than I cared to own. Then I went to Aunt Sophia.

"What is the matter, Nora?' she said, when I found her. 'You are trembling all over and looking so ill. What is wrong, child?'

"I want to ask you a straight question,' I replied. 'Who was, or who is, Aunt Ethel? I have never heard of her.'

"Aunt Sophia looked startled. She did not speak for a minute; then she said, with considerable reluctance. -

"It doesn't matter about your Aunt Ethel. She has been long in her grave. Let her memory rest in peace'

"But what about her?' I said. 'I *will* know,' I continued, and then I repeated what Rudolf had told me.

"Aunt Sophia looked very queer. After a further pause she said: -

"Rudolf has done wrong, but as you know so much you may as well know all. Your Aunt Ethel was your father's eldest sister. She went mad when about your age, and eventually ended her days by suicide.'

"And I was never told,' I said, turning white.

"Why should you be told?'

"But there must be insanity in our family.'

"Hers was the only case. Don't think about it again, child. Busy yourself with those active employments which a woman in your position has naturally so much to do with.'

"I left Aunt Sophia and returned to my room. There was a moon in the sky. My bedroom windows were open. I lit a pair of candles at each side of the long mirror at one end of the room, and deliberately studied my face. I had always known that my eyes were somewhat peculiar, my pupils being more dilated than those of most women."

"That fact merely betokens a high degree of nervous sensibility," said the Professor.

"I examined my eyes that night," I continued, "and it did seem to me that they had a wild and startled glance. I called my courage to my aid, however, and determined not to be fanciful, and to try to forget my cousin's words. That was easily said, but very difficult to act upon. My courage certainly did ebb as night went on. I found that my thoughts dwelt on Aunt Ethel and her horrible fate, and also found that I could turn them

in no other direction. Presently I went to the window and looked out into the beautiful night. The moonlight was falling across the grass and causing black shadows under the trees.

"Suddenly I uttered a scream and fell back, too startled to keep my self-control. For gazing at me fixedly out of the deep mass



"I UTTERED A SCREAM AND FELL BACK."

of foliage were two very bright, luminous eyes, eyes full of a strange and terrifying gleam. I saw them as distinctly as I now see you. I watched them move, and saw them glitter as they disappeared into the darkness. When they had quite vanished I knew that I was cold all over. I shivered with a most awful sense of dread. My first desire was to run straight to Aunt Sophia, tell her the whole truth, and beg of her to share my room for the night. But on reflection I resolved not to do this. I did not want Aunt Sophy to know. She would certainly not have believed my tale, and she would put down the vision which I had seen to the same cause to which Rudolf would doubtless attribute it.

"There was no repose for me that night. The thought of those eyes kept me company—the eyes themselves and Rudolf's significant words: 'If you encourage those morbid fancies you will share the fate of poor Aunt Ethel. The pupils of your eyes point to a disordered brain.'"

"In the afternoon of the next day I went for a solitary walk by myself. We have pine woods at the back of our house. From there I could see at intervals the tower which is the oldest part of the mansion. It is situated at the end of a long, rambling building, and was in existence at least four centuries ago. It is a curious old Norman tower, with arches over the windows and a castellated roof. The tower contains only two rooms, the lower one being the library of our house and the upper my father's study.

Since his death no one has been near that part of the building. I felt a sense of reproach as I remembered his room now. Was his study neglected and covered with dust? Were the flowers in the vases dried up and dead? I would go to the study to-morrow and see that it was made fresh and clean. I would open the windows and let in the sweet air. Nay, more, when the long-looked-for and eagerly expected

letters arrived from South Africa I would read them in my father's study.

"That evening I paced up and down for a long time in the pine woods, then I returned to the house. I took up a novel and tried to read, but the book did not suit my mood. I remembered another which had begun to interest me, and which I had left in one of the drawing-rooms. I went downstairs to fetch it. There was no one in the room. I found the book in a distant corner and returned slowly to my bedroom. To do this I had to go down



"IN THE DARKNESS I AGAIN SAW THE GLEAMING EYES."

a long corridor into which many rooms opened. For some extraordinary reason the electric light in this corridor was not turned on. I noticed how dark it was, and just as I reached my own door I looked back, impelled, I suppose, by instinct. In the darkness at the farther end of the corridor I again saw the gleaming eyes. They stared fixedly at me without blinking, and with a horrible leering expression in their gaze. Again I screamed, rushed into my room, and locked the door. I could scarcely endure my misery.

"'Am I going mad or am I the victim of an apparition?' I said to myself. 'Is my

brain giving way? What am I to do? How am I to endure this? How am I to live?"

"The next week or ten days passed without any further disturbance, and I was beginning to recover my mental balance. Rudolf was away from home during the greater part of that time, engaged on some very special business in the North of England. I was undoubtedly happier and less nervous when he was absent, but when he returned his affectionate and concerned manner about me made me self-reproachful, and I almost wondered at myself for the intolerable feeling of repugnance which I always felt towards him.

"Two or three nights after his return I saw the eyes again. On this occasion they stared at me from the centre of the rose-lawn. The night was black as pitch, and there were the eyes raised between five and six feet above the ground, and staring full at me with unblinking directness. After this visitation I determined to see you at once. Now, can you help me? Have I been visited by an apparition or am I mad? Tell me what you really think."

For reply the Professor said, quietly:—

"I will examine your own eyes before I pronounce an opinion."

I rose at once. He placed me in a chair in front of a large window and, taking up some powerful lenses, carefully looked into both my eyes. When the examination was over he said:—

"You are very nervous. Some of the higher nerve centres are in a state of irritation. Your father's death, joined to the shock of this apparition, trick, or what you like to call it, has been too much for you. You ought really to leave home."

"But am I going mad?"

"There is no trace of a disordered brain. Nevertheless you are nervous, and nerves are kittle cattle, and ought to be attended to."

"But, Dr. Ellicott, why should I be nervous? Why should I see those ghastly eyes? What is the mystery?"

"I should like much to unravel it," he said, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"How I wish you would!"

He looked thoughtful for a minute or two; then he said:—

"Would it be possible for you to invite me to stay at Courtlands?"

"Would you come?"

"Could you give me a room where I could continue my business without interruption?"

"I could hand you over the library in the old tower. There you need never hear a

footfall, for the tower is at the end of an unused wing at a remote part of the building."

"In that case I will bring my things and spend a few days at Courtlands. I do not believe in your apparition as an apparition, nor do I think that you are becoming insane. Your case interests me. May I arrive in time for dinner this evening?"

"I don't know how to thank you," was my answer.

"Expect me at Courtlands about seven o'clock. And now leave me, like a good girl, for I have many things to attend to."

I returned home with a great sense of relief, just in time for lunch. The only people at table were Aunt Sophia and my Cousin Lionel.

"Why, Nora," cried my aunt, "how much better you look! Have you had good news?"

"Yes and no," I replied. "By the way, Aunt Sophy, can we entertain a visitor for the next few days?"

"A visitor now?" she said, raising her brows in astonishment.

Lionel laid down his knife and fork and looked hard at me.

"To receive a visitor in the house now would be unusual, would it not, Nora?" he said, gently. "My uncle has not been dead a month yet."

I took no notice of him, but turned again to Aunt Sophia.

"Dr. Ellicott, the well known Professor, is staying at Ashingford," I said. "I met him some time ago at the Newcomes'. He is a remarkably clever man, and I may as well confess that I consulted him medically this morning. No more Dr. Jessops for me. I preferred to consult one who was well up-to-date on medical matters. The Professor interests me and I interest him. He wishes to come here for a few days in order to watch my symptoms. He will arrive in time for dinner. Please, Aunt Sophy, will you order the green room to be got ready for him, and also the library in the old tower?"

I spoke in a decided manner, and neither my aunt nor Lionel ventured to remonstrate, for, after all, I was really mistress.

Suddenly I turned to my cousin.

"Is Rudolf away again?" I asked.

"No," he replied; "Rudolf is unwell. His eyes are hurting him. He is obliged to stay in a darkened room."

"I did not know that Rudolf suffered from his eyes."

"He never did until lately. We neither of us can imagine what is the matter with them," was Lionel's response.

I said a word or two of commonplace condolence, and then left the room.

That evening the Professor arrived, and when I entered the drawing-room before dinner I noticed that my aunt and both my cousins were waiting to receive him. During dinner he made himself generally agreeable, and Rudolf in especial seemed to be attracted by his manner and powers of conversation. I noticed, however, rather to my amazement, that my elder cousin wore a shade over his eyes, and in the course of dinner I inquired what really ailed them.

"I don't know," he said. "I am in considerable pain. My eyes are very much inflamed."

"Will you permit me to do something to relieve your symptoms?" said Professor

"I have examined your cousin's eyes. There is considerable inflammation both in the eyelids and the eyes themselves. Their condition points to a strange diagnosis, but as it seems impossible that it can be the right one I am not prepared to say anything further on the subject—at least now. Tell me, are you going to have a good sleep to-night?"

"I hope so."

"I think you will, for I have prepared a small, but effectual, draught, which I want you to take just as you are lying down. Get your maid to sleep in your room, and believe me that, eyes or no eyes, you will be in a state of oblivion five minutes after you take my draught."

I smiled, with a sense of relief.

"I believe," I said, "that in any case I should sleep well with you in the house."

The next few days passed without anything fresh occurring. We saw but little of the Professor. He was absorbed with his own work in the old library in the tower.

At last the day arrived when we expected letters and news from the beloved dead. Even Aunt Sophia was agitated, and Lionel and Rudolf were like restless ghosts, hovering

here, there, and everywhere. Rudolf's eyes looked worse than ever, and he also complained of a strange sore at his side. At dinner that evening the Professor said, abruptly:—

"By the way, Dallas, do you happen to know anything about that new substance—radium?"

"I have heard of it," was the reply.

Lionel's face became suddenly rigid and very pale. Rudolf, on the contrary, looked with the utmost composure at Professor Ellicott.

"You, of course, have studied its properties," he said. "Tell me about them. I dabble in many things, and, above all enjoyments, to peer into the mysteries of



"WILL YOU PERMIT ME TO DO SOMETHING TO RELIEVE YOUR SYMPTOMS?" SAID PROFESSOR ELICOTT.

Ellicott, suddenly, turning as he spoke, raising his pince-nez, and fixing his gaze on Rudolf's face.

"I wish you would," was the reply.

"I will look at your eyes after dinner. And now, Miss Dallas," he continued, turning with courtesy to my aunt, "let me explain that knotty point to you."

He was discussing a little matter with regard to the growth of ferns, and Aunt Sophia, a keen botanist, was listening to him with rapt attention.

By-and-by I made the signal to leave the room, and the gentlemen were left to themselves. In the course of that same evening the Professor came to sit near me

science delights me most. But give me an account of the properties of radium."

"They are too varied to mention here. I will but allude to one or two. In close contact with the skin, radium has the effect of absolutely destroying the epidermis and the true skin beneath, thus in time producing an open sore. Moreover," said the Professor, "were you really dabbling with this strange substance the state of your eyes would be accounted for."

"I have never even seen the thing," was the abrupt answer.

The conversation turned to other matters. After dinner we all went to the drawing-room. Professor Ellicott came and seated himself near me.

"You will receive a letter from your father by the next post?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Where will you read it?"

"In his study. I have always read his letters there. I made him a promise that I would do so. He said he would like to think of me sitting under my mother's portrait, reading his letters and thinking of him."

A few minutes afterwards the postman's ring was heard, and a servant entered with several letters on a salver. The one I had expected was handed to me, and there was also a foreign letter for Aunt Sophia. Rudolf, who had come into the room just before the servant brought the letters, came up to me.

"You will go away by yourself and read your letter," he said, kindly. "You will read it in your father's study, won't you?"

I nodded. He smiled.

"I felt sure you would go there, Nora. He will be with you in spirit."

As Rudolf uttered the last words he glanced towards Lionel, and the two left the room a minute or two before I did.

To reach the tower I had to go down a long corridor which was seldom used. At the farther end of the corridor was a baize door which opened on to some narrow stone stairs. They were worn with age. Mounting them, I soon reached my father's study on the top floor of the tower. It was octagonal in shape, with many windows. These windows were closely barred and the panes of glass were small. When I entered the room I gave a start of surprise. I expected to see it in darkness, but instead of that a small table had been drawn up within a foot or two of the high, old-fashioned grate, and on it were placed a pair of brass candlesticks with candles in them already lighted. But why were the blinds not drawn down at the

windows? I felt a momentary inclination to repair this omission myself, but my father's letter occupied all my thoughts and I soon forgot everything but the fact that I was about to read the beloved words—in short, to receive a message from the dead.

The contents of my father's letter absorbed my complete attention, and I soon perceived that only the very early portion was written by himself; most of it had evidently been dictated to a certain Edward Vincent, whose name, as one of the young lieutenants in my father's regiment, was already familiar to me. The letter told me that my father was mortally wounded, and that he was now partly writing, partly dictating his last good-bye to me in the tent where they had removed him after the skirmish with the enemy. In the letter he told me that he had received my last communication, and, in consequence, had made inquiries, which took some little time to come to fruition. On that very morning, however, he had received a long letter from London, which contained a complete confirmation of what I had told him, and also many other revelations had been forthcoming, which filled him with the utmost displeasure and horror. He therefore resolved immediately to change his will, leaving none of his property to my cousins, but all to me. The last words of his letter desired me to turn to the opposite page, on which a formally-worded will was written. This will left everything to me. I turned to it and read it. It was very short, and was signed by my father, and had also the signatures of two witnesses.

Tears flowed from my eyes. In one sense I was relieved, and yet my heart was torn. I covered my face. Just then a slight noise, which might have been attributed to the tapping of a bough against the window pane, caused me to turn my head. I did so tremblingly. I felt convinced that I was not alone. Something, or someone, was looking at me. Fascinated, I gazed straight before me. Again came that ghastly tap, which, I felt sure, proceeded from no human hand. I looked towards the upper panes of one of the windows, and there were the eyes. Never had they seemed more malicious or horrible. I lost my nerve, gave one shrill and terrified scream, and rushed towards the door, altogether forgetting my letter, which lay upon the table.

I had just reached the door when a fresh thing happened. The room became full of a sudden and terrible wind. It caught at the table-cover, flapping it violently. The letter,

written on thin foreign paper and consequently light as air, floated off the table with one or two other loose letters, was carried straight to the fireplace, and then up the chimney. The next instant I felt my dress dragged as by an unseen power. Something seemed to draw me back into the room, and the candles on the table flickered and went out. I was in the dark and alone, yet not alone. What awful thing had happened? My brain swam for a minute. I felt sick and cold; then I lost consciousness.

When I returned to my senses I was lying



"MY BRAIN SWAM FOR A MINUTE."

on the sofa and Professor Ellicott was bending over me.

"Now, control yourself, Miss Dallas," he said. "We have not a moment to lose. Tell me exactly what occurred."

I pressed my hand to my face. There was a light again in the room.

"Be quick," said the Professor. "What did you see? Why did you cry out? I was coming into the house in a hurry—in fact, I was on my way to this room—when I heard your shriek. I had been smoking and walking up and down in the grounds. Something induced me to look towards the tower.

All of a sudden I saw—but tell me first what did you see?"

"The eyes," I answered. "They looked at me through one of the windows—that one exactly facing the table."

"Through what part of the window did they look?"

"Through one of the topmost panes."

"Good! I thought so. Now go on. Tell me the rest."

"I lost my nerve. I rushed towards the door, and just as I got there I turned, for the room was full of wind."

"Wind!" said the Professor. "Why, the night is as calm as death."

"Nevertheless, the room was full of a sort of gale, and the letter—my father's letter—was lifted and carried towards the chimney, up which it disappeared, and I myself was dragged back into the room. Then the candles were put out. Oh, I do believe at last in the ghost, Professor Ellicott, I wish I were dead."

"Don't be so silly, child. I assure you there is no ghost. Now, listen. I also saw something."

"The eyes?"

He nodded.

"They flashed at me for an instant. I fancy, Miss Dallas, this is a very tangible ghost. I saw a figure crouching on the roof, bending down over the turret towards that very window. I was just under the tower, hastening in, when you screamed, and I looked up and saw it disappear behind the parapet. The eyes were visible for about half a second. We shall catch your ghost, don't be afraid, and solve your mystery. I shall remain here for the present, but we

must have the roof examined, and at once. Do you know of any other way to get to it except by a ladder from the ground? There surely must be a trap-door somewhere."

"There is," I answered. "There's a trap-door at the end of this very wing."

"Good!" said the Professor. "Go downstairs at once and get several men, your cousins amongst them, to examine the roof from end to end, and in especial to look on the roof of this tower. I will stay here. Don't be long."

I ran away. The Professor's words had excited me, and my courage had returned.

I gave the alarm. I could not find my cousins, but soon the rest of the house was in a state of ferment. Some of the men-servants and two of the gardeners immediately ascended to the roof. They carefully examined not only the roof of the house, but that of the tower. But look as they would they could not see a single trace of any individual hiding there. It is true that a rope, fastened to one of the chimneys, was hanging close to one of the parapets of the tower. This alone pointed conclusively to the fact that someone had been there. Nothing else, however, was to be discovered.

Accompanied by Aunt Sophia I returned to the Professor.

"Four of our men have been on the roof," I said, "and they brought away this rope. You can see it. There was no one there."

"Ah!" He shrugged his shoulders. "I thought there must have been a rope. He could not have bent over so far without being secured against the possibility of falling."

"The rope was fastened round one of the chimneys," I continued.

"Professor, what does this mean?" said poor Aunt Sophia.

"Where are your nephews, madam?" was his answer. "Why are they not helping in this search?"

"We cannot find my cousins anywhere," I answered. "The last I saw of them was when I was going upstairs to read my father's letter. They then left the drawing-room and went out of the house arm-in-arm."

"I will go and have a further search made for them," said my aunt. "They certainly ought to be acquainted with this most remarkable occurrence."

She gave me a suspicious and, I fancied, unbelieving glance. Did she really think that I was imagining the whole thing? The Professor's attitude, however, comforted me.

"Don't be alarmed, child," he said. "The clue which we seek is close at hand. I am convinced of it. Now we must do something. I shall remain in this room for the night, and one or two of the servants must watch on the roof of the tower. But you must go to bed and rest, otherwise you will be down with nervous fever. Now, tell me, please, Miss Dallas, who are the most trustworthy and absolutely reliable servants in your house?"

"Harris, the old gardener, for one," I answered. "He has been with us since before I was born."

"Who else?"

"Franks, the butler."

"Then Harris and Franks shall watch on

the roof of the tower to-night. Now go to bed."

Against my will I was forced to go to my room. Another sleeping-draught, administered by the Professor, ensured my repose, and in the morning I was sufficiently calm even to defy Aunt Sophia's looks of suspicion, for suspect me now of incipient insanity she evidently did.

The mysterious disappearance of both my cousins caused a great deal of talk and speculation on the following morning, and I went to the tower to visit the Professor in a state of great excitement on the subject. His manners were absolutely non-committal. He refused to say anything about my cousins, and he also refused to leave the study.

"When I go someone else must take my place," he said. "This room must not be left unguarded for a single moment, nor must the roof above."

Towards the latter part of the day he suggested that I should take his place in the study while he himself examined the roof. In about half an hour he returned to me. I saw that he held a tiny glass tube in his hand.

"Can you make anything of this?" he said, laying it on the table before me.

"Nothing," I answered. "What is it?"

"A very valuable piece of evidence, I take it."

"What do you mean?"

"I will try to tell you. I found this tube in the gutter just above that window. It is, as you see, sealed up at each end. It looks innocent enough; nevertheless, it contains a very minute portion of that new substance—radium. You heard what I said to your Cousin Rudolf with regard to the effect of radium on the human skin, but I did not tell him that it does something else. When held for a short time in front of the eyes, the eyes take to themselves a certain amount of its properties, and they glow in the dark with a great luminosity which gives them a most terrifying appearance. It strikes me, Miss Dallas, that in this little bottle I hold the solution of your ghost. The eyes of a man who held radium a short distance from his pupils would also become very much inflamed. Consider the condition of your Cousin Rudolf's eyes. I found this tube in the gutter. We are getting near the clue; eh, don't you think so?"

I felt myself turning pale. I know that I trembled.

"Could any man living be so wicked?" was my next remark.



"COULD ANY MAN LIVING BE SO WICKED?"

"Men will do strange things for money," was his answer. "But how your cousin would know that your father intended to change his will is a mystery which I cannot fathom."

"What do you mean to do next?" I asked.

"Watch for the scoundrels. They are hiding somewhere, and all in good time they will reappear. By the way, you say that your father's letter, containing the will, was blown up the chimney. James," he continued, turning to the servant who had just entered the room, "you and Andrews must come up here within an hour and take my place while I visit the roof. I may have to remain there for some hours this evening. Meanwhile, Miss Dallas," he continued, giving me a quick smile, "you shall go and take a constitutional."

I did not want to go out, but the Professor's word just then was my law. The evening was a lovely one, and I walked for some little time. As I returned I looked towards the tower. Suddenly I perceived the tall figure of the Professor. He was standing absolutely motionless near one of the chimneys. He evidently saw me, but did not make the slightest movement. A wild desire to be with him and to share his watch came over me. Quick as thought I

entered the house, reached the trap-door, which was open, and soon was standing on the low roof of Courtlands. I walked warily and presently reached the edge of the parapet. There were two steps here leading from the roof of the house to the roof of the tower. I mounted them and stood by the Professor's side.

"Child," he said, in a whisper, "what are you doing?"

"I must share your watch," I said.

"I would rather be alone."

I shook my head.

"Something forces me to remain with you. Don't deny me my wish."

He held up his hand with a warning gesture to me.

"Then you must crouch by this parapet," he said, "and remain motionless. I shall hide behind the chimney. My suspicions are confirmed. There are men not far from here. I heard a movement not long ago. Absolute quiet will force the scoundrels from their lair."

I now perceived that he carried a revolver. Moving away from him a few paces I crouched down behind the parapet. He did likewise a little way off. We were the only watchers on the silent tower, but I knew that there were servants also on guard in the room below.

By-and-by the sun sank towards the west and twilight reigned over the scene. Twilight deepened into night.

The Professor and I had remained motionless, as though we were dead, for from two to three hours.

All of a sudden I saw Professor Ellicott raise himself and glance towards me. I could but dimly see his face, but I knew that something was about to happen. The next minute, peering hard towards the stack of chimneys, I noticed, to my unbounded horror, the head of my Cousin Rudolf show itself. He did not see us, and cautiously began to descend from the chimney on to the roof. Just as he was about to place his feet on the roof, Professor Ellicott, strong as steel, sprang upon him and dragged him by the shoulders and arms down upon his knees.

"I have been waiting for you," he said. As he spoke he held his revolver to my cousin's ear. "If you stir you are a dead man. Confess your crime at once. Your

game is up! Now, then, what does this mean?"

Rudolf groaned.

"The agony in my eyes is past bearing," he said.

"Call to your brother to come out of his hiding-place. I will take you both to the

hard on you," I answered, my voice trembling. I saw him shiver slightly. His tall, athletic figure was bowed. He still kept his face covered with his hand. As to Lionel,

he was crouching in the attitude of an unmistakable cur in a distant corner.

"This is the story," said Rudolf. "There is no use any longer hiding things. I was in serious money trouble—Stock Exchange debts, the usual thing. The money left to me in my uncle's will would, however, have put me again on my feet. Were it for any reason withdrawn, nothing remained for me but open disgrace and ruin.

"For years it has been my one effort to keep my transgressions from my uncle's ears, and only for the extraordinary instinct which you, Nora, possessed, and which caused you to watch me as a cat watches a mouse, I should have succeeded in securing the fortune which he meant to leave me. Lionel was much in the same

boat. We decided, therefore, to act together. For a long time we have been in league with a certain Lieutenant Vincent, a young officer in the same regiment as my uncle. My uncle was much attached to Vincent. In the hour of his death Vincent happened to be near, and it was to him my uncle dictated his letter, the letter which you received last night. On the afternoon of the day when the news of my uncle's death was received here I had a long cablegram from Vincent, in which he gave me briefly the contents of the new will, which was already on its way to England, and also said that both the witnesses, privates in my uncle's regiment, had been shot dead shortly after he breathed his last. Thus there were no witnesses to prove this will. He said we must make the best of his information, and we had a month to mature our plans in. We put our heads together and resolved on a course of action. We knew the history of Aunt Ethel. Nora has always had very highly strung nerves, and we perceived to our satisfaction that they were terribly upset



"HE HELD A REVOLVER TO MY COUSIN'S EAR."

Colonel's study. There you shall explain your villainies."

"Let me rise, and I promise you I will not try to escape," answered Rudolf. "I am in such pain that I am past caring for anything but the chance of relief. I will shout to Lionel. We have been starving, and have been in the dark. Oh, the agony in my eyes!"

The Professor allowed Rudolf to rise. He went to the chimney and called down. In a moment Lionel made his appearance. Professor Ellicott then escorted the two men across the roof, down through the trap-door, and back again to my father's study.

"I cannot face the light," said Rudolf at once, covering his eyes with his hands. "I have endured more than I bargained for. If I am happy enough to escape without the punishment of the law, I will confess everything."

"That remains with Miss Dallas, for she is the person you have injured," said the Professor.

"Tell the truth, Rudolf. I won't be too

by her father's death. I had been reading a good deal about the newly discovered substance—radium, and thought it possible that it might serve my purpose. I purchased a minute portion and began at once to work on my cousin's fears. Radium, as you know, when held near the eyes, can give them a luminous and very ghastly appearance. I got Nora to believe that she was the victim of a terrifying disorder, and you are aware how successfully my purpose worked. I further arranged, with Lionel's help, to deprive Nora of the fresh will as soon as she had read it; our belief being that her story would not be credited, and that when she spoke of a new will having been sent to her the whole thing, in combination with her story of the ghostly eyes, would be put down to insanity.

"Now, this was our plan: We knew that her habit was to read all letters received from her father in his study. We investigated this room thoroughly and made an important discovery. A few feet up the wide chimney was a secret chamber. The entrance to this chamber was approached by climbing down the inside of the chimney from the roof. This mode of entrance was facilitated by projecting bricks left for the purpose. We resolved to utilize the chamber for our requirements.

"As soon, therefore, as the post arrived from South Africa, Lionel and I left the drawing-room. We immediately went by the trap-door on to the roof. Lionel disappeared down the chimney into the secret chamber, where we had previously taken an immensely powerful exhaust-pump. In the bottom of the chimney there was placed a short time ago a large register, thus closing up the space, except for a small hole in the centre, in order to let the smoke pass up. Leading from the exhaust-pump we had arranged a large tube, the mouth of which fitted exactly into the hole in the register. We had also put in order a small electric bell which communicated from the roof to the chamber. After Lionel had dis-

appeared down the chimney I prepared my eyes, and at the right moment bent over the parapet.

"All the time Nora was reading her letter I was looking at her, and when I perceived that she had quite taken in its contents I attracted her attention by gently tapping on the window with a spray of ivy. She turned instinctively. Again I tapped, and she looked up and saw me. As my brother and I guessed she would, she uttered a scream and immediately tried to leave the room, forgetting the letter, which still lay on the table. I immediately rang the bell. Nora was too terrified to hear it. At the signal Lionel began to work the exhaust-pump by means of a hand wheel. It sucked the air out of the study, and drew the letter and other small papers up the chimney right into the tube. Thus we secured the letter and the new will.

"I then joined Lionel in the secret room, not forgetting to take with me the wires from the electric bell. We both immediately set to work to draw back the tube into the secret chamber, and by the time Nora had recovered consciousness all trace of our plot had virtually disappeared."

"What about the will? Have you destroyed it?" said the Professor.

"Strange to say, we have not," replied Lionel. "The fact is, we were in the dark and starving. We had hoped, but for your interference, to get away in a few minutes. We have been incarcerated for twenty-four hours. Rudolf was in agony with his eyes. We wanted to read the will before tearing it up."

"Then you can give it to me?"

"Yes. We have it here intact, and, if our cousin will permit us, we will leave the country to-morrow and never trouble her again."

They did so. I did not wish to pursue them, as I doubtless could, with the punishment of the law. My terrors were over. Never more would the ghastly eyes alarm me.